NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 533 NEW YORK, MARCH 16, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

FACING AN UNSEEN TERROR

—OR— NICK CARTER'S DAY OF BLUNDERS

By The Author Of "Nick Carter"

Nick was on the point of withdrawing his head from the interior of the hack, when he felt something whiz past his cheek and bury itself in the cushions of the carriage.

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Avenue, N. Y. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1907, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C.*

No. 533. NEW YORK, March 16, 1907. Price Five Cents.

Facing an Unseen Terror

OR,

NICK CARTER'S DAY OF BLUNDERS.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A MURDER IN A CROWD.

"That man is a criminal!"

The five words smote upon Nick Carter's sense of hearing as plainly as if they had been addressed to him, but although he wheeled suddenly to discover who had uttered them, he found that he could form no definite opinion upon that point.

He was surrounded by many men; they were standing on every side of him; they were moving hither and thither through the throng, jostling one another, shoving with their elbows, and conducting themselves exactly as men will always do in a crowd.

Nick was puzzled. He prided himself upon his ability to locate sound; but for once, at least, he was at fault, and already the man who might have made the remark had doubtless moved away. Moreover, it was not likely that the remark had been addressed to him, or even that it was intended for him to hear. He smiled as he wondered vaguely who could have said it, and against whom it was directed.

It was "Horse-show week," and Nick, moved by a sudden impulse, had entered Madison Square Garden during the middle of the afternoon as he was passing that way. It happened that the hunters were being judged at the time, and he had edged his way along until he stood close to the rail, where he could see into the ring, although to do so he was obliged to peer over the shoulders of several who were standing in front of him.

His mind had been absorbed in contemplation of the spectacle, when he overheard that rather startling sentence of five words already recorded; and when he looked around him in the effort to determine the source of the remark, he saw only a group of faces, each as absorbed in the interest of the show as he had been before the remark disturbed him.

After a moment he shrugged his shoulders and smiled, thinking to himself that the statement had merely been one of many thousand casual remarks which one will overhear in such a place.

"It isn't likely that it referred to any person who is present here now," was his mental comment, at last. "Doubtless two men were discussing some mutual acquaintance."

He turned his attention again to the ring.

A large, black hunter was just taking the bars in a splendid leap which at the finish elicited a storm of approval from the spectators; but the shout of approval was changed into a cry of warning as the horse, on alighting, turned its arched neck and bit viciously with its wicked-looking jaws at the legs of the man in the saddle.

Nick leaned forward with the rest, to obtain a better view of horse and rider, surprised, as others had been, at such an exhibition of temper on the part of a horse which, though high spirited, seemed otherwise kind and docile.

But the detective's interest in the horse and its rider was quickly forgotten, for at the instant he bent forward he heard the voice a second time.

"The man is a criminal," it said.

Again Nick turned round to discover who had spoken; again he was puzzled as to the source of the remark.

Among the dozen or more countenances into which he looked there was not one which he could select as probably belonging to the man who had spoken.

Every one was peering forward. Every neck was craned. Every individual interest seemed to be centered upon the scene inside the ring.

And even there, after the first moment of surprised excitement over the action of the horse, the incident was forgotten.

Again the detective shrugged his shoulders, and was about to dismiss the subject from his thoughts, when from the opposite side of him the voice sounded again.

This time it came to him in a shrill whisper, and this time he did not doubt that it was intended for him.

But, exactly as it had been each time before, not one of the faces into which he looked seemed to him to belong to the owner of the voice, and the detective began to wonder if he were not really the victim of the joking of a ventriloquist.

But he dismissed that thought at once, for it was scarcely a time or a place for such horseplay as that.

The detective remained where he was for a long time after that, paying no attention whatever to the horses in the ring, but devoting his energies entirely to the effort to discover the source of those remarks; but, although he waited long and was alert all the time, the interruption did not occur again, and at last he reluctantly withdrew from the denser part of the crowd and was about to leave the Garden, when he felt a hand placed upon his arm to detain him.

"Pardon me, sir," he heard a voice say at the same instant; and, turning, he discovered that one of the men who had stood near him when he was near the rail was now detaining him.

The voice, too, was the same as the one that had spoken in his ear, and Nick knew now that without any effort of his own he had discovered the man who had done the talking; he thought he knew, moreover, that it had been to himself, after all, that the remarks had been addressed.

The man was tall and spare, and was elegantly dressed. His long, thin, lean face was sallow, his eyes were preternaturally bright, and were overhung by shaggy iron-gray brows, and he wore a shapely, drooping mustache.

In that first brief glance Nick decided that he was a handsome man prematurely gray. He also rated him as a society dilettante, an exquisite, and as one who was doubtless well known by many others in the throng that moved about him.

He was rather too ostentatiously dressed. His clothes were in the height of fashion; he wore a profusion of jewelry for a man; he was decidedly interesting; and there was a certain air of distinction about him which was plainly apparent.

"Well?" inquired the detective, raising his brows interrogatively.

"Did you see him?" asked the man eagerly. "I saw that you were looking at him."

"See who?" asked the detective.

"The fellow I pointed out to you; the one I spoke about."

"I think, my dear sir, that you will have to be rather more explicit than you are," said Nick, moving a little to one side and approaching a spot where the crowd was less dense; and then, as they came to a pause a second time, he added:

"Do you mean that it was you who attempted to call my attention to somebody whom you supposed to be a criminal?"

The man nodded a vigorous reply.

"Yes," he said. "That is it. I told you twice—no, three times—that the man is a criminal. You heard me?"

"Yes, I heard you. To whom did you refer?"

The detective had begun to think that he had encountered a crank, or at least a man who was not exactly in his right mind.

"I referred, of course, to the man on the horse," replied the stranger.

"The man on the horse? Which horse? There were many horses in the ring at the time."

"I know. The man on the black horse. I thought you saw him."

"No doubt I did see him. But why did you speak about him at all? And, what is more important, why did you speak to *me* about him?"

"Because I saw that you were looking at him."

"Well?"

"I thought possibly that you had recognized the fact, sir."

"What fact?"

"That the man is a criminal."

"I can truthfully say to you that I had no such thought," said Nick slowly, fixing his eyes steadily upon the man in front of him. "In fact, I did not look at the man at all. I would not recognize him now if I were to meet him face to face. I was interested in the horse only."

"That is to be regretted, sir. I am sorry that I interrupted you."

The stranger would have turned away then if the detective had not detained him; but he put out a restraining hand, and said:

"Wait a moment, please. Tell me what you are talking about, won't you?"

The stranger paused, raised his heavy brows, and smiled; and then, with an expressive shrug of his shoulders, he said:

"I am, of course, talking about the man in the ring; about the man who rode the black horse—the horse that made the big jump."

"Yes, I know."

"I was watching him. I came here to-day to watch him. I was curious to discover how he would comport himself, here in this place. I happened to be standing there when you joined the group—when you elbowed your way in among us, and so got near to the rail. I saw that you were interested in the same man—or believed I did; so I watched you as well. And then I made the remark I did, because I believed that you would understand. I see now that I made a mistake. I beg your pardon, sir."

"One moment," said Nick. "Tell me why you think the man is a criminal?"

"I do not think that he is a criminal; I *know* that he is one."

"Will you tell me how you know that?"

"No. It would not interest you. I will bid you good afternoon, sir."

"One moment," insisted the detective. "Won't you tell me your name?"

"It is not necessary. Good afternoon, sir. I do not know you; it is not necessary that you should know me."

Then, before the detective could suggest anything that would detain the stranger longer, the man had shoved his way past several others, and in a moment more Nick could see his tall, spare figure as it dodged hither and thither among the people, until at last it was lost to view.

"Queer chap, that; eh, Carter?" said another voice, and Nick turned to discover that Conner, of the central office, was now at his elbow.

"Hello, Con," replied the detective. "Yes, he was a queer chap. Queer here," and he tapped his forehead significantly. "Do you know him, Con?"

"Never saw him before, that I know of. I thought he was bughouse when I saw him talking to you. That is why I edged a little nearer. What——"

Conner did not complete the sentence, for at that instant a loud and startling shout came to them from toward the opposite end of the building, and at once the crowd began to surge in that direction; and then from lip to lip was passed the horrifying intelligence that a murder had been committed.

"Come!" said Nick; and he leaped the barrier into the ring, closely followed by Conner, so they were able to make their way rapidly toward the scene of the excitement.

Already several of the policemen on duty in the Garden had gathered around and were endeavoring to keep the crowd back; but Nick and Conner were instantly recognized by the officers of the law, and thus were enabled to pass quickly through the throng until they stood together within the ring of densely packed humanity, and found themselves looking down upon the cause of all the excitement.

And that cause was the dead body of a man who had been stricken down in the midst of the crowd—and the body was that of the same individual who had so lately spoken with the detective.

CHAPTER II.

A HORSE THAT TRIED TO KILL.

The eyes of the dead man were open and staring. One might say that there was an expression of horror in them, only that if the truth be told there is always an expression that is akin to horror in dead eyes that are open.

A terrible blow at the top of the forehead had crushed in the skull, a blow which had unmistakably been made by the shod hoof of a horse, and at first glance this seemed to be the primary, and, in fact, the only, cause of death.

But as the detective stepped nearer to the body and bent over it, he saw that under the left arm of the body, and rather toward the back, the hilt of a weapon of some kind was sticking out, and he knew instantly from that that the man had been stabbed before he received the blow from the horse's hoof.

A groom was standing near at hand with a horse-blanket thrown over his arm, and, seizing this, the detective threw it over the body, effectually concealing it from view, and then, with Conner to aid him, he directed that the body should be conveyed at once to one of the administration-rooms of the building.

There, with policemen stationed outside the door, on guard, to reply to all questions and to hold the crowd at bay until the arrival of the coroner, Nick and Conner locked themselves inside the room with the corpse.

It was not until then—not until the door was securely locked, that Nick drew aside the blanket and called Conner's attention to the presence of the weapon.

"Look there, Con," he said. "Tell me what you think of that."

Conner bent forward and devoted a moment of silence to an inspection of the odd-looking hilt or handle of a weapon; and when he did straighten up, he said, with an expressive shrug:

"If the horse hit him first, what was the use of the stab, Nick? And if the stab hit him first, what was the use of the horse?"

"Good, Conner!" was the instant reply. "I did not think you would hit upon that at once. I think that the stroke from the horse's hoof was an accident."

Conner was silent a moment, then he nodded his head.

"It's a murder, all right, Nick," was his comment. "Faith, I made up my mind to that the moment I heard the shout, out there; and it's a little strange, too, that instantly I thought of the funny duffer I had seen talking to you. Now, will you tell me why——"

"Wait a moment, Con," interrupted the detective. "I want to go outside a moment; but I want you to remain here on guard while I am gone; will you?"

"Sure."

"If the coroner comes, ask him to defer his examination until I return. Ask him to do me the favor not to touch the body until then; will you?"

"Sure."

"I won't be any longer than I can help."

"Wait a minute, Nick. Maybe you're going out to attend to something that I have already seen to. I have a dozen men here, under me, in plain clothes, and I passed the word to have them round-up everybody who saw the accident, to get their names and addresses, and such statements as they could, from them."

"That's all right, Con. I knew that you had done that."

The detective went out then, and he proceeded directly to the basement of the building, where the show-horses, or many of them, were temporarily stabled.

Already the "accident" had ceased to be the general topic of conversation; such is the temper of a New York crowd—or, rather, its temperament. "Accidents will happen," etc., and the sooner they are forgotten, the better.

Nick had no difficulty in finding at once the big, black hunter that was being shown in the ring at the time of his encounter with the strange man, now dead; and as he stopped in front of the box stall where the beautiful animal was standing, and looked in upon him as if with casual admiration, the man who had him in charge stepped forward.

"What are you looking for, mister?" he asked gruffly. "Strangers aren't allowed down here."

"Aren't they?" replied the detective. "Well, I'm not exactly a stranger. Were you up above just now, with this horse, when the man was killed?"

The hostler started back a step, then he laughed.

"I guess you're dreaming, mister," he said then.

"Dreaming about what?" asked the detective.

"This horse ain't killed no man. It was him that did it. It was another hoss that looks like him."

"Was it? I did not ask you if this horse had killed a man. I asked you if you were up above with this horse at the time the man was killed."

"Oh! Yes, I was."

"Did you see the man killed?"

"Say, look here, what do you think I am, anyhow? Do you suppose that I want a lot of coroners and flycops and all that sort of thing chasing around after me for the rest of the week? Well, I rather guess not, mister. I ain't answering any questions."

Without a word of comment, Nick sprang the latch of the half-door of the box stall and threw it open; and then, as he was about to step inside, the hostler threw himself in front of him; or, rather, he attempted to do so, for he did not quite succeed; but as the detective entered the stall, the man followed him aggressively, and doubtless would have seized him by the arm to prevent the entrance, had not something in the expression of Nick's eyes, as he turned them upon the fellow, caused him to withhold his hand.

But he was none the less aggressive, for all that.

"You ain't allowed in these stalls, mister," he said.

Without replying, Nick passed directly around the horse to his fore feet, and picked up the right one in his grasp; but as he did so the hostler recovered his courage, and, reaching out, he seized Nick by one arm and forcibly pulled him away from the animal; and then he stepped quickly between the detective and the horse, and, doubling his fists, he snarled:

"I don't know who you may be, and I don't care, either; but if you think you can come nosing around down here and running things to suit yourself, you are much——"

He did not get any farther in what he was about to say, for the reason that Nick seized him and spun him around like a top, and sent him whirling out through the door of the stable into the corridor.

"If you attempt to come inside of this stall again until I am through here, I will make you regret it," said Nick quietly; and then, without paying any further attention to the man, he turned once more to the horse.

A moment of inspection assured him that the forward hoofs of the horse had been carefully polished since his return to the stall; he realized that the hostler had only ceased his work of polishing them as he approached, and that if there had been blood-stains upon the iron shoes or upon the hoofs, they had been effectually removed before his arrival.

He looked about him then, and he saw where a small cupboard had been let into one side of the stall, and,

opening the door of this, he found inside cloths and bandages and other impedimenta for such occasions.

On one of the hooks inside of this small closet there was a piece of chamois which had the appearance of having been in recent use, and Nick took it in his hand; then, after a moment of inspection, he folded it and started to put it in one of his pockets.

The hostler, who had been leaning over the top of the half-door, watching him, now called out angrily:

"Hey, there! What are you doing? Swiping my cloths?"

The detective turned to reply; turned so that his back was toward the horse, and so that he faced the man who was framed in the doorway—and he still held the chamois-skin in his hand preparatory to putting it in his pocket.

But as he was about to make a laughing rejoinder to the man's question, he saw the expression of the hostler's face change; saw that the man's eyes were fixed in horror upon something behind him; saw that the fellow was trying to cry out a warning without being able to utter a sound—and he turned quickly.

None too quickly.

The big black hunter had raised himself into the air so that now his huge black silken barrel towered over the detective. The jaws of the horse were open, showing his gleaming teeth; the eyes of the animal were blazing; his fore feet were pawing in the air, and he was in the very act of striking at the defenseless detective when Nick discovered him.

Nick Carter's first emotion was one of amazement, for the horse had been as docile as a kitten until that moment; but it was an instant fraught with danger as great and as imminent as any he had ever faced, and he acted on the second that he saw his peril, for everybody who knows anything at all about horses knows that a striking and biting horse is thrice as dangerous as one that kicks.

With one quick leap he dodged under the descending hoofs of the horse; with another he reached the closed half-door, and vaulted over it, knocking the hostler to one side as he did so; but he alighted on his feet outside the stall and turned to face the maddened animal while the hostler, with curses on his tongue, slowly picked himself up from the cemented floor.

But Nick was not listening to what the hostler said; he was watching the horse with a studious attention which made him unmindful of everything else.

Never in his life had he seen demoniac rage more plainly depicted than it was in that animal.

His ears were laid back against his head; his jaws were distended; his eyes flashed; his nostrils were wide and showed red, and he still stood upon his hind feet, pawing the air as if in an effort to strike an imaginary foe—but striking blindly all the while, as if his own excess of temper had thoroughly blinded him.

And as Nick watched him, he gradually became quieter; he dropped down upon all fours again; he closed his jaws; the distention of his nostrils subsided; the rage went out of his eyes, and in a moment more he was standing as quietly in his stall as if nothing had happened, and there was not a thing about him to suggest the paroxysm through which he had just passed, save the heaving of his sides as he panted to regain his breath.

"That was strange!" said the detective, speaking more to himself than to the hostler, who had now rather timorously drawn nearer; but the man replied:

"You ought to thank your stars, mister, that you got out uh there alive. He ain't safe to monkey with, that hoss ain't."

"Is he often taken that way?" asked Nick, as if with becoming indifference.

"Not often, mister. But he is sometimes. You saw that yourself."

"What was it that started him? He seemed quiet and kind enough, when I first went inside the stall."

"Yep. But it was because I thought he might hurt you, that I tried to keep you out. I suppose he thought it was me when you first went inside; but when he found out the difference, he let loose, that's all." There was a leer of cunning in the man's eyes which interested the detective, although he pretended not to notice it; and again he asked:

"What started him?"

"I suppose it was the smell——" The man stopped abruptly and scowled. Then he swore, under his breath, and the detective smiled.

"That is just about what I supposed," said the detective quietly. "It was the smell; the smell of that chamois, eh, that I took out of the cupboard and was holding in my hand? Tell me, my man, how much money would it require, paid into your hand, to induce you to enter that stall with that particular ragged skin in your hand, and hold it for an instant under the horse's nose? How much money would it take to induce you to do that? Eh?"

"It would take a sight more'n you've got, mister! I can tell you that!" was the hot reply.

CHAPTER III.

THE MYSTERY OF A PERFUME.

Nick waited a moment before he made any remark concerning that reply; but then he said, quite casually:

"I suppose it would be perfectly safe for me to reenter that stall, *without* the chamois skin in my possession, would it not?"

"Sure," was the instant reply.

"Or for anybody at all?" continued the detective.

"No—that is——"

The man stopped suddenly, and again the detective noted that cunning expression in his eyes; but he set his jaws firmly together, and remained silent.

"Go on," said the detective.

"I've said all that I am going to say, mister. I don't know who you are, or why you come nosing around down here; but I suppose you're one of them plain-clothes men—flycops, eh?"

"Possibly. I want to find out why the horse killed the man."

Again the cunning in the hostler's eyes.

"Maybe the man had the chamois skin in his pocket," he suggested, with a leer; but Nick paid no attention to the intended sarcasm; instead, he altered the style of his questioning.

"I would like to know," he said, "how it was that you dared to use that particular piece of chamois to polish the horse's hoofs, after he was brought back to his stall."

"Go to—blazes!" exclaimed the man. "I ain't going to say no more."

"No? What would you think, my man, if I were to charge that horse with murder, and arrest the animal?"

"I would think that you're a bigger fool than you look to be, and that would be saying a lot."

"And, also, if I should arrest you as an accessory before and after the fact?"

"Well, that would be about in keeping with the rest, mister. I suppose you think that you're smart, but I guess you're the only one that has that opinion. The hoss didn't mean to strike the man at all. He struck at me and missed me, and hit the man. That's all there is about it, if you must know."

"Oh! So you are ready to admit, now, that this horse did kill the man, are you?"

"Yes."

"And you say that it was quite an accident that he hit the man?"

"Yes."

"That the animal really struck at you?"

"Yes."

"Tell me now why the horse struck at you?"

"I don't know as I can tell you that, unless it was that I went up after him with that rag that he hates so, in my pocket. I forgot that I had it there, you know; never thought a bloomin' word about it at all. Just went right along up there with the old skin-rag in my hand, and waved it in front of his nose without thinking at all about it, and that—that man happened to be standing in the way, and he got it. That's all."

"Who was the man?"

"How do you s'pose I know who he was?"

"Don't you know who he was?"

"No, I don't."

"Who was the man who rode the horse when the hunters were being judged?"

"I don't know that, either."

"What!"

"Well, I don't."

"How does that happen?"

"The boss ain't here; ain't been here to-day, at all; ain't likely to be here. But along a couple uh hours ago a fellow comes down here with a note from him, and he says to me that the boss can't come; that he's sick, or something—drunk last night, I suppose—and that he had brought an order from him to let him—the fellow, I mean—ride Arab in the hunter class for the boss. So I fixes him up—Arab, I mean—and gets him ready, and the stranger takes him as soon as I leads him to the ring; and that's the last I see of him until after the judging is over, and the fellow puts the bridle-rein into my hand and thanks me without ever passing me a tip, or anything; and then when I reaches out my hand to take the hoss, I has the rag in it, and up Arab gets into one of his fits—and you know the rest."

"That all sounds extremely lucid and plain," replied the detective. "Will you explain why you did not give me all this information at once?"

"Well, I didn't know who you were, did I?"

"You don't know that yet, do you?"

"No; but I'm beginning to guess."

"Who was the man who rode the horse? Where was he—but answer the first question. Who was he?"

"I tell you I don't know."

"Don't you know his name?"

"No."

"You say that he brought you a letter from your boss?"

"Yes."

"Where is the letter?"

"You can search me."

"Haven't you got it?"

"No."

"What did you do with it?"

"Gave it back to the feller that brought it, after I had read it."

"Why did you do that?"

"He asked for it."

"Where is the man now?"

"I ain't seen him since the accident."

"Are you quite sure of that?"

"Of course I am."

"Did he not come down here with you, when you brought the horse back?"

"No; he didn't. I ain't seen him sence, I tell you."

"And you do not remember his name?"

"No, I don't."

"What is the name of your master? Your boss?"

"I'm working for Mr. Damon, if that'll do you any good to know."

"Oh," said the detective, smiling. "In that case, the man who came to you with the letter should have been Mr. Pythias."

He made the remark lightly enough, for want of something better to say, but he was astonished at the effect it produced upon the hostler. The man started back, half-gasped, and then, after a moment of hesitation, grinned broadly, as he said:

"Well, you're a pretty good guesser, mister. You're a peach at it, you are! That's what his name was. I remember it now. It was in the letter. 'Please let Mr. Pythias ride Arab to-day' is what it said. You're a guesser for fair, you are!"

Nick did not know what to make of the strange conduct of the man, and he turned away for a moment to think it over.

As he did so, he turned toward the box-stall in which the horse was now quietly nibbling at some straws that were sticking up from the bedding, which was almost knee-deep inside the enclosure. He had wrapped the piece of chamois in his handkerchief and deposited it in his hip pocket; but now he drew the package out again, and shook the chamois skin loose in his hand.

He was on the point of raising the chamois to his nostrils, when he was startled by a loud snort from the animal in the stall, and he had only time to leap back out of danger before the horse was dashing toward him again with distended jaws, and with every outward appearance of intense rage.

"You infernal fool!" exclaimed the hostler; and he reached forward and tried to snatch the chamois skin from Nick's hand.

But the detective quickly drew it out of his reach; and then, stepping away from the entrance to the box stall, he smelled of it.

It had been saturated, apparently, with one of the new perfumes. Nick recognized it as one that is called "Pau d'Espagne"—Spanish leather—and the detective suddenly recalled the fact that the stranger who had accosted him, and who later was killed, had reeked with the odor of that same perfume.

"I don't quite understand why the horse should be sent into a rage by the mere smell of that perfume," he thought to himself; and then, without again turning toward the hostler, or noticing him at all, he passed along to another box, where a noble-headed horse was peering out at them curiously, and he thrust the evil-smelling chamois skin under that horse's nose.

The animal sniffed at it in some disgust, but beyond turning his head away, to signify that he did not like it, he made no demonstration; and Nick again folded the objectionable article, wrapped it again in his handkerchief, and thrust it back into his pocket.

He turned then to ask more questions of the hostler; but that individual had made use of his opportunity, and had disappeared.

Along the corridor a little way toward the stairs which but that individual had made use of his opportunity and Nick approached him.

"You saw me, just now, at that stall down there, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the man.

"Where did the man go with whom I was talking?"

"He went out to get a drink, I think, sir. He does that every little while. My boss wouldn't stand for it, but I suppose his does, or he wouldn't do it."

"Did he say anything to you as he went out?"

"He said that he'd be back in half an hour. It'll be feeding-time then, so I suppose he will."

"I suppose you know that that is the horse that killed the man up-stairs, don't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you see it? The killing, I mean?"

"No, sir. I was down here."

"Have you ever seen anything strange about that particular horse?"

"No, sir. I haven't any eyes for horses only my own, sir. I know that he has rages once in a while. I think it's a crazy horse, sir. There are such, you know. I don't consider it safe to show alongside of an animal like that, and I've told Mr. Myers as much; but he only laughed and said he guessed we could take care of our own."

"Do you know Mr. Damon, the owner of that horse?"

"No, sir. Nobody knows him."

"What's that?"

"It's a fact, sir. I've heard Mr. Myers—that's my boss—ask about him, and nobody knows him at all. He only had that one horse entered, and now I guess, after what has happened, it will be withdrawn; don't you?"

Nick nodded and turned away. He saw very plainly that while this man was well intentioned, he was also stupid, and that there was no information to be gotten out of him.

Having no doubt whatever that the hostler who had charge of Arab would return soon, and that he could be readily found when he was wanted, the detective turned away and mounted the stairs, hastening at once to the administration-room, where he had left Conner in charge of the body of the stranger.

And when he entered that room he found that the coroner had just arrived, and was only awaiting his appearance to proceed with the examination of the body, which was still covered by the blanket that Nick had thrown over it.

"All right, coroner," he said. "We'll go ahead now; but after a little I will tell you something strange about this case."

CHAPTER IV.

A CRIMINAL'S CLEVER WORK.

The man whose body was beneath the blanket has already been described sufficiently for the purposes of this story, save that he had evidently been a person of refinement and culture.

The blow that he had received from the hoof of the horse was a terrific one, and it had fallen upon him with such force that it had crushed the skull as if it had been the shell of an egg.

Nevertheless, the blow was what might be called a clean one; that is, it had not mutilated the victim's head save by that one crushing, violent blow.

Usually a horse in striking downward with its fore-foot drags the hoof against the object attacked, and so cuts and tears it in a terrible manner, the hoof acting almost like a knife; but here the blow seemed to have been direct, as if the hoof had been lifted the instant the blow fell.

Now, there was no apparent reason for this, save that one that was enunciated by Conner at the moment when Nick called his attention to the hilt of the weapon that protruded from the body of the corpse, under and slightly behind the left arm.

And this strange looking weapon, or hilt of a weapon, requires a word of description.

It was unlike anything of the sort that the detective had ever seen before, in that it was very small and appeared more as if the implement were an ornament rather than a weapon. A woman's hat-pin might have been fashioned like it, and not regarded as strange. It was not long enough to be grasped by the hand of an ordinary person; a child of eight or ten years might have closed the hand upon it, but not a grown man or woman; and when the coroner pulled it from the wound and held it up for the inspection of his two companions, it was seen that the blade—if it could be called a blade—was not long enough to give it a deserving title of weapon.

In a word, the blade of the strange weapon was not longer than three inches.

The whole thing was far too enormous for a scarf-pin; it was too small for a hat pin; it was not large enough for any practical utility, and it was too large for ornamental uses.

When the coroner took it in his hand and began to examine it, Nick shouted out for him to be careful, for he saw instantly that the blade alone could not have killed, he knew already that the little weapon had been the cause of death, and therefore the only logical deduction was that it was tipped with poison.

"Be careful, coroner," he said. "Don't touch the point of it, or more than likely we will have to call in a second coroner to sit on you. Now, will you let me look at it?"

Nick took it in his hand gingerly, but a moment's inspection demonstrated that the only danger that could rest in the weapon must be in its point. He carried it across the room to a window, and stood where he could examine it in the sharper light.

It was shaped exactly like a cross, the guard forming the crosspiece and the blade being the upright; nor was it too long proportionately. The handle part of the upright was round; the blade part was flat, with a slight convexity, but not enough to give the blade an edge. The crosspiece was square.

What surprised the detective most as he looked at it was the lightness of the whole thing, which might have been made of aluminum; and then as he balanced it in his hand he noticed that the blade end was much heavier than the other.

And then, studying it more closely, he discovered a small nob at the end of the handle, and, wondering what this could be for, he pulled upon it.

Instantly a fanlike arrangement of thinnest ivory was unfolded from the handle, and closed upon it again when the rod was pulled way out, so that it created an air rudder for the flight of the thing when it should be thrown; made it look like a dart, or a strange form of arrow that would be guided point first through the air, if thrown, or hurled, or shot toward a given object; just as the Indians used to finish their arrows with feathers to make them go straight.

He nodded his head and pushed the rod back into place.

"It is as I thought," he said. "It was *thrown* at the man who was killed, and there is no telling, one cannot even venture to guess, from what distance it was thrown."

"But it struck the man before the horse hit him, did it not?" asked Conner.

"Yes. I think that the man was already falling—was already dead, in fact, when the hoof of the horse struck him on the head."

"You do?" asked the coroner.

"Yes; I thought that at once. The condition of the wound inflicted by the horse bears out that idea. A horse, when he strikes with a forefoot, tears down, cuts, rends, rips. This blow did not do that. When the hoof slid off after delivering the blow, the man had already collapsed upon the ground. There was nothing left for the hoof to drag upon, therefore there was no tearing."

The coroner nodded.

"The point is this," continued the detective. "The man had received the wound from this tiny weapon just at the instant when the horse struck at him. He received the blow from the animal's hoof, but in reality he had received his death-blow an instant sooner.

"One would think that the murderer took sufficient trouble to make sure of his victim," said the coroner; and then he added hastily: "That is, of course, one would think so if it were not for the fact that the blow from

the horse was, of course, an accident. But isn't it strange that the man should have been murdered in just that way? Just think what an unnecessary crime it was. Had the murderer stayed his hand, the horse would have done the deed for him; had the horse stayed his hoof, the man would have been killed, anyhow. It's a strange circumstance, Mr. Carter."

Nick was silent a moment before he replied. Then he said:

"Coroner, I would like you to listen calmly to me, to the end of what I have to say to you, for I earnestly hope that you will find it convenient to postpone the inquest upon this body, for a time."

"What!"

"In the first place, it was not an accident that the horse struck the man, and struck such a blow that it would have killed him had he not been already dead. It was design."

"What's that, Carter? You don't mean to suggest that a horse can commit murder in the first degree, do you? Premeditated murder?"

"I mean that the horse that struck that blow which has crushed in the skull of the dead man had been carefully trained to attack and to kill, if possible, upon receiving a certain signal."

"What nonsense is this, Carter?"

"It is not nonsense. The horse is down below at this moment. Only a few moments ago it attacked me, and would have killed me, too, if I had not succeeded in getting out of the way."

"Do you mean to say that a horse can be taught, upon a certain signal, to attack a man with murderous intent?"

"I mean to say that very thing. Only you must not misunderstand me. I do not mean a signal in the sense in which you now make use of the word."

"How do you mean it, then?"

"We are apt to understand the word 'signal' to refer to something that we can see, or hear; but a signal might be arranged between two persons of intelligence, which would make use of any other one of the five senses, as well as of the two already mentioned."

"Go on."

"For instance, if you were to dine with me to-night, in company with others, and there should be doubt about the wisdom of our talking freely among all the guests, I could arrange with you that if your coffee was given to you already sweetened, it would mean that you could talk freely, and that if it were not sweetened it would mean that you could not talk freely, you would understand it, wouldn't you?"

"Certainly."

"Very good. I might arrange the same sort of signal with my odor. I might make use of a handkerchief scented with musk to indicate that you were in danger, or with violet, to indicate that you were not in danger. You would understand either, if those signals had been prearranged."

"Certainly."

"Very well. The strongest sense of understanding that a horse possesses is that of smell. A horse is frightened by things it sees, only because it does not see plainly. Its sight comprehends only the outlines, only the shape of objects; from any strangely shaped objects it shies. But there are certain scents which terrify horses the world over, until, at least, they have accustomed themselves to those scents."

"Go on. This seems to be a dissertation on natural history."

"Not at all. I am particularizing only because I wish you thoroughly to understand the premises upon which I build the statement I am about to make to you."

"I'm only chaffing. I know that you have a good reason for everything you say. Go on."

"We do not yet know who this man was, probably because we have not yet investigated far enough. He seemed to be known to many, in a casual way, without being known to anybody really. But, whoever he was, when he lived, he had been marked down as a victim for assassination. I cannot yet prove that statement; but I am reasonably certain of it."

"Well?"

"Now, the manner of his death tells me that there were two parties here, in this building, this afternoon, both seeking to kill him. One of those parties had trained himself to the dexterous use of this little weapon, which he could hurl through the air from a considerable distance; the other was yet more subtle, and had trained a horse to do the murderous work for him."

"Carter, I can't accept that at all, you know, unless you demonstrate to me how the thing could be done."

"Very well, I will demonstrate. You have already been bending over the body of that dead man, so I may suppose that you have noticed the perfume he used; eh?"

"I should think so. It is unpleasant to me. Many people use it, nowadays, though why I cannot understand."

"I agree with you in that. But, still, it is a perfume, and is enjoyed by many; by women in particular. It is called Pau d'Espagne."

"I believe so—yes."

"You noticed it at once, did you not, when you came in contact with this body?"

"Yes."

The detective removed the folded chamois skin from his pocket and, without taking it from the handkerchief, extended it toward the coroner.

"Inside that handkerchief," he explained "there is a piece of chamois skin that I found in the box stall that

is occupied by the horse that struck that blow. Smell of it."

"The odor is the same."

"Precisely. Now, a little while ago, when the horse attacked me and would have killed me if I had not gotten out of his way, it was because he smelled that odor. Do you understand?"

"But——"

"That particular odor tells that particular horse that he must kill. He has been taught to understand and to obey that signal. It is not necessary that we should inquire how he has been taught it; it is enough for the present that we know he *has* been so taught. That odor means *'kill!'* to that horse. The man who did the teaching was bound by an oath, doubtless, to kill that man; he knew that the man now dead used that particular perfume, and used it copiously. He had only to teach the horse to do the killing for him by teaching him to kill whenever he smelled that odor, and then to manage to bring the horse and the man face to face. I call it a remarkably clever piece of work, don't you?"

"I hardly know what to say, Carter. I don't believe yet that a horse could be taught to do such a thing," replied the coroner doubtfully.

CHAPTER V.

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF THE HORSE.

It is not necessary that we should here enter into a detailed account of the examination of the body of the murdered man, so strangely done to death in the midst of a crowd; it will be sufficient for our purposes that we deal with results only.

Nick told Conner that he had never had a case before which suggested quite such possibilities as this one did.

"For here," he said, "is a double murder committed on one victim. Here is the body of a man of whom it must be said that he was twice killed. Of course, one would rate that statement among Irish bulls, or it might be called a physical impossibility; but it is not a physical impossibility. It is a theoretical fact. The man was twice killed in so far as he was the recipient of two death dealing wounds, either of which would have taken his life. And the other was killed as surely [illegible]

"The two [illegible] were [illegible] almost [illegible] in fact, as to be almost simultaneous; and that fact—or, rather, those facts—convince me that the two persons who engineered or directed those blows were each ignorant of the intention and of the act of the other.

[illegible]

who threw it, or shot it, *and we must not forget that that particular person—we will say that it is a man for want of better knowledge—believes that he is the murderer.*

"On the other hand, the person who taught the horse to perform that trick with his hoofs whenever he detected that particular odor, believes that *he* is the murderer, since he knows nothing at all of the poisoned dart."

"But," said Conner, "the man who threw the dart must know that his victim was also struck by the horse."

"Without doubt; but he also knows that the dart will be found in the body, and that it will be known that it was the dart that killed; while, on the other hand, the other man knows nothing of the dart. Don't you see that there are two murderers here?"

"Yes."

"And that each one is equally guilty?"

"Yes."

"And that each one believes himself to be the really guilty one?"

"Yes."

"And that the probability is that neither suspects the design of the other one?"

"That is the part about which I do not feel so sure."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that either would have held his hand had he known that the other was about to make the attempt?"

"No, Nick, I don't see that it follows."

"Why not? One man—like that man whose body lies before us—does not create enemies who naturally would seek to kill him in a public place, as this murder was committed. But one man like that one might easily have become the member of a society which would condemn him to death, which would order his assassination, and which would appoint, not one, but two, executioners."

"Now, what do we know about this dead man? Next to nothing.

"Our inquiries have been almost fruitless. We have discovered that nobody here knows anything about the man, save that he appeared in New York, four days [illegible] of the time of the [illegible] of the three, and presented letters of introduction which made him acquainted with the members of what we might call the exclusive set here. Beyond the fact that he was known as Baron Sternfeldt, that he was registered at the Hotel Mammoth under that name, where he occupied a suite of three rooms with his valet—we know nothing about him.

"There are no letters or documents in his pocket which tell us anything at all, more than that. He registered as hailing from Germany; but he did not take the trouble to state what part of Germany he was from when he registered—*and the valet has not been seen around the hotel since yesterday morning.*"

"I confess that that part of it puzzles me, Nick. What do you suppose has become of the valet?"

"I know just as much about it as you do; no more. But my own opinion, based upon the theory already advanced, is that the valet was merely a spy, who had nothing to do with the commission of the crime more than to report the movements of the sentenced man, and to make himself scarce when he was told to do so."

"Isn't the dead man the same one with whom you were talking, just before I spoke to you outside?"

"Yes."

"You haven't told me what he said to you then."

"The substance of all that he said—and he said it in rather a mysterious manner—was to the effect that the man in the saddle on the back of the horse that afterward killed him was a criminal."

"Well, he got it pretty nearly right at that, didn't he?"

"So it would seem."

"Did the baron know who you were when he spoke to you?"

"I don't think so."

"Then why should he have selected you for the repository of his confidences?"

"That I cannot answer, save on general principles."

"Tell me what they are, won't you?"

"I think that the baron realized, or, at least, believed, that he was doomed. His eyes had the hunted look of one who is in momentary expectation of death, and has no idea from whence the blow will come, nor where it will fall. He wanted a confidant, and he selected me; he longed for sympathy, and he sought it in a perfect stranger; and after he had spoken he was frightened at his own temerity, and sought to get out of my sight as quickly as possible, lest those who threatened him should guess what he had done, and hasten their acts."

"Which is doubtless exactly what was done; eh?"

"Yes."

"And that, in turn, would indicate that there was a spy near at hand when the baron spoke to you?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Well, Nick, it is all a very strangely mixed up case to me."

The detective did not reply to this remark. Instead, he turned to the coroner and said:

"I think, coroner, that we have done all that can be done here. The money in the pockets of the dead man will pay all the expenses that may be incurred in the care of the body, and until the court directs that it may be used, I will supply the funds. May I make some suggestions to you?"

"That is what I wish you to do, Carter."

"Then I would suggest that you give the body into the care of the Mercer people. They are better competent to take care of it than anybody else. There is no reason why you may not direct that it be embalmed, and exposed to view for a stated time, in the hope that some relative or acquaintance will claim it for burial?"

"No."

"Then I would do that. I will put one of my assistants on watch over the body. I would wish that nothing whatever be said at present about the poisoned dart. Let it be forgotten among us for the time being. There is no objection to that?"

"No."

"And postpone the official inquest for a few days?"

"Yes."

"I think that is all for the present. I will ask you to go with me now to see the horse that crushed the baron's skull. Would you like to see him?"

"Yes."

"He is called Arab; is a beautiful horse, as kind and docile as one could wish until he smells the odor of Pan d'Espagne. Then, look out! Come."

Nick led the way with confidence through the building, and at last down the stairs to the basement where the horses were cared for. He descended by the same stairs that he had used before, and he led the way confidently toward the box stall where Arab was quartered.

While he approached he did not see the hostler who had tried to prevent his entrance to the stall, and when he reached the door of the stall itself he stopped, amazed.

Arab was no longer there.

The box stall was empty; the horse was gone; and, with the animal, had also disappeared the trappings which belonged to it.

That other hostler—the one whom Nick had questioned and thought so stupid—was seated where he had been before, and to him the detective again applied.

"Hello, my man," he said. "Have you been here ever since I went up-stairs?"

"Yes, sir," was the reply.

"And where is the hostler who went out, as you supposed, to get a drink?"

"He returned as soon as you went away, sir."

"Oh, he did, eh? And what did he do then?"

"He took the horse away."

"So I see. Was anybody with him?"

"No, sir. He was alone."

"Did he have permission to take the horse out, or did he go away without it?"

"He had to have permission, sir. He could not get out of the building without it—that is, he couldn't do it with the horse."

"Did he say where he was going, or why he was taking the horse away?"

"No, sir. He didn't say a word. He came back as soon as you left. You weren't more than out of sight when he appeared. I called out to him as he passed out that you wanted to see him, and that you were coming

back to do so; but he didn't even answer me. He just went right on to the stall where his horse was kept, opened it, led the horse out, packed the few things he had there, threw a blanket and a hood on the horse, and led him out of the building. When he went past me with the horse I asked him if he was going away for good, and then he called back over his shoulder that he and the horse had been fired out of the show. That is all I know about it."

Nick drew Conner aside.

"Con," he said, "I want you to go to the Hotel Mammoth as quickly as you can, get to the room of the baron, see to it that nothing in the rooms is disturbed until I get there, and then wait quietly for me. Will you do that?"

"Yes."

"I am going to try for what information I can pick up around the Garden. I will probably be with you inside an hour. Coroner, I will telephone to you when I have anything that would be of interest."

"All right, Nick. I'll expect to hear from you soon."

When the detective was alone he hastened at once to the officers of the show, and, having sought out the one official who had the reputation of knowing everything and everybody who was even remotely connected with the exhibition, he said to him:

"Starbuck, I haven't had a chance to see you since the accident—since the man, Baron Sternfeldt, was killed by the horse Arab; but, all the same, I have been looking after the matter a little."

"I'm glad of that, Carter," was the reply. "I have just sent a messenger to your house after you. I thought it was in reply to that message that you were here."

"No. But why did you send for me?"

"Because there is a mystery about that affair somewhere. I don't know what it is, or anything at all about it, save that—well, save that there is a mystery, and I hate mysteries."

CHAPTER VI.

FACING AN UNSEEN TERROR.

"Wait a moment," said the detective. "After the man was killed, I went to the basement to see the horse. I found him and saw him, and also the hostler who had charge of him. Then I came away again and went up to the room where the body of the man had been taken in order to be of such assistance as I could to the coroner. We were there about half an hour, I should say, possibly more than that, and then we went together to the basement of the building again to see the horse. When we got there, horse and hostler had both disappeared. I want to know how that happened, and where the hostler was taken. He, who knew the horse well, in fact, of the two persons, was best able to find Arab."

Gerald Starbuck smiled broadly.

"The answers to those questions comprehend exactly what I sent for you to find out for me," he said, with his inimitable drawl. "It's a devil of a puzzle, you know; the whole thing."

"Do you mean to tell me that you don't know to whom the horse belonged?"

"The owner's name is entered as Alfred Damon; city address, as Hotel Mammoth; home address, as Tioga, Pennsylvania; name of horse, Arab; pedigree—but you don't want all that. It is all a bunch of infernal lies, anyway. Damon came to me with letters of introduction from men I knew well. I met one of them here yesterday morning and mentioned the presence of Damon with his horse. He didn't know either one or the other. I then set inquiries afoot, but soon after I did that I was called away on an urgent matter, and only just returned. The horse would not have been here to do that killing if I had not been absent myself."

"Have you made any inquiries about——" began the detective; but Starbuck interrupted him.

"Inquiries! Yes," he said. "I've made a lot. The trouble is that I didn't make them soon enough. We are rather jealous here, as you know, of whom we let into this show. I have always been very careful about the matter. This time I was a little careless, and I regret it."

"Tell me what inquiries you have made, and what was the result of them."

"Nobody knows anything about Alfred Damon. He did not stop at the Mammoth; or, if he did, it was under another name. Nobody knows anything about that particular horse. There is a horse by that name and with the pedigree he gave, but he isn't here. The horse was a fraud as well as the master. Nobody in Tioga, Pennsylvania, knows anything about the man; and then, to make matters worse, he broke one of our rules this day in sending a substitute to show his horse without supplying the proper credentials. I don't know how he—the substitute, I mean—got into the ring, but he did get there."

"But how did the horse get out of the building?" asked Nick. "How was the hostler able to take him out without your permission?"

"He had my permission; he had my orders. I ordered the whole outfit to skip, don't you see?"

"I see—yes. But why did you do that?"

"I did it because I was a jolly chump. I did it in haste. I did it before I took time to think. I did it, and the horse was gone before I knew half as much as I know now—and the more I find out, the less I know."

"I see."

"That is why I sent for you. I'd like to make an example of that fellow!"

"Just because he worked an unregistered horse on you? Just because he imposed upon you, or have you another reason?"

"Gee, isn't that enough?"

"Possibly. But I have another reason, and a better one, for wishing to know something more about that man and his horse."

"Have you? What is it?"

"The horse was brought here purposely to kill that man. The whole thing was——"

"But look here, Carter! That's beastly nonsense, you know!"

"It isn't nonsense at all. I will explain it all to you in a moment; but first I want to know what you can tell me about the baron."

"Nothing. That's another."

"Another what?"

"Fraud. Sting. Imposition. You can call it what you please. The baron—I don't want to say anything against a dead man—was just as much of a fraud as Darwyn. The only difference was that one was inside the ring with a motive to exhibit, and the other was outside, to advertise."

"But the baron had letters of introduction also."

"Forgeries, like the other fellow's letters. There have been several to see me since the killing, to tell me so."

"Nobody really knew anything about Baron Sternfeldt, then?"

"Nobody that I can find. I tell you, Carter, if this thing is allowed to go by without a thorough investigation, it will give our show a black eye; and I won't stand for that, you know. And now you tell me that there is a murder behind it all—only I'll be blowed if I swallow that, you know."

"It is true," said the detective, and then he began at the beginning, and took Starbuck completely into his confidence, knowng that he could be thoroughly trusted.

It was not until the detective came to the description of the strange weapon used by one of the assassins that Starbuck evinced particular interest in the matter. Until then he acted as if the whole thing existed only in the imagination of the detective; but when the peculiar dart-shaped implement was mentioned, he figuratively pricked up his ears and took notice.

"I would like to see that small weapon, Carter," he said. "Where is it?"

"I have it here—with me in my pocket. But before I show it to you, tell me if you have ever heard of such a weapon before."

"Yes; I have."

"When and where, please."

"I suppose you know—already know, in fact—that I am a sentimental hunter after big game, and in my pursuit of that sport I have visited almost every unknown corner of the earth."

"Yes."

"I go somewhere every year; or, at least, once in two years."

"Yes."

"One of my favorite hunting-grounds is India. I was there two years ago, and intended to go there again this year, only that I was prevented from doing so at the last moment."

"Well?"

"In the mountains of Nepal—the Himalayas, you know—northwest from Khatmandu about two hundred and fifty miles, there is a place which is known among the natives of that section of the country as 'The Sacred Valley.' I won't bore you with my story, if I can help it, but you will find it interesting."

"Go on."

"Show me that weapon first. I want to see that before I tell my story; for, if I do not mistake, the little instrument you have described came from there."

The detective had placed the weapon in one of the compartments of his pocketbook, and now, after taking it from the wrappings he had wound around it, he gave it carefully into the hand of his companion.

"Be very careful with it," he said. "I have no doubt at all but that it is tipped with a deadly poison."

"Nor I. I know that much about it already. Thank you. Yes, it is the same. I will put it there until I have related my story;" and he placed it on the table beside him.

"The interior of the Sacred Valley is as much a mystery to the people of Nepal who live outside it as it is to you or to me; more than it is to me, for the reason that I have been inside it and have lived to return. Others have not. It is said that no one ever returns from the Sacred Valley."

"Go on," said Nick, when his companion paused.

"I wandered inside the place because I was lost, and because from the cliff upon which I stood I could see human habitations down there. I thought that I could find somebody to act as my guide, if I went down into the valley.

"I will tell you what I did find."

"Well?"

"I found a strange race of people. Strange in the fact that they are totally different from any other natives of India, or of Asia, that I ever saw. They are very tall and supple and handsome. The women are extremely beautiful. Their skins are as white as mine. They are as blond, in fact, as the Swedes."

"Eh? Is that so?"

"Yes. Blondes, with hair that is almost white, with skins which seem to defy the effect of the rays of the sun, but with eyes as black and as fiery as any Hindu you ever saw."

"That is strange."

"Not so strange as the people themselves. They are a silent race."

"Dumb?"

"No; silent. They rarely speak at all, and then usually in monosyllables, although I happen to know that they can talk fast enough if they wish to do so. They dress with exquisite taste, and one might think that one had stepped into a reproduction of ancient Venice, if the costumes are accepted as criterions. But all that isn't the story I was to tell you."

"It is interesting. Go on."

"To go back to where I left off?"

"Yes."

"I was lost—hopelessly lost from the rest of my party. I had been separated from the others two days and nights. The second morning when I awoke—I was cold, too, for the altitude was considerable—I was at the mouth of a canon; at least, that is what we would have called it in Colorado. I was rather surprised, too, to discover that a definite trail led through the cañon, and I resolved to follow it. In the course of time I came out upon a plateau, at what I might call the inner side of the mountain, and you can imagine my astonishment when I saw far below me, at the bottom of a valley, buildings, temples, palaces, and edifices, which made up a city of considerable size.

"I had never heard of a city in that part of the world. I rubbed my eyes to make sure that I was not deceived. I thought at first that it was a mirage; but second thought told me that it could not be that.

"I remembered that in coming up the cañon I had seen strange signs along the route which I could not read.

"Well, I'll make a long story short.

"I saw that it was undoubtedly a city that was below me. I saw a valley which stretched away until the end of it was beyond my range of vision. I saw evidences of civilization; and I determined to go there.

"There was a trail before me which seemed to lead into the valley, and I followed it.

"I want to tell you that I was all day long in making that descent, and that road was not bad, either. The air became perceptibly warmer as I advanced, and I finally decided that it was a place not unlike the famous valley near Guadalajara, in Mexico, where you descend from the temperate to the tropical climate in a few hours.

"It was evening, or almost that, when I reached the bottom. Directly in front of me was a huge arch, through which I had to pass to get out upon the level road which must lead me to the city. Well, I passed under the arch, and——"

Starbuck stopped directly and shuddered. He seemed suddenly to be deprived of speech and power of motion. He was staring straight past Nick Carter, toward the door of the room, which was directly behind the detective, and there was an expression of terror in his eyes, as if he saw something that was frightful over Nick Carter's shoulder.

CHAPTER VII.

THE WOMAN BEHIND THE SCENES.

If you who read this were seated facing a companion who suddenly comported himself as Gerald Starbuck did at that moment it would be your natural impulse to turn around instantly to discover what had happened to induce such terror.

Such was Nick Carter's impulse; but at the same instant an intuitive something told him not to move a muscle; and at the same instant he saw that Starbuck's lips were moving.

The detective read the words that were uttered, rather than heard them. He was conscious that Starbuck said to him:

"Don't move, Carter! For God's sake, don't move! Don't turn your head or move a finger, or you are a dead man. Sit still, and let us pray that the danger will pass. You may not be injured if you do not move, while if you do, you will surely be killed."

It required some nerve to sit perfectly still under those conditions, but Nick did so; the fact was, he thought that there could be no real danger; he believed that it existed only in the imagination of his companion, and that it had been conjured up by the relation of the story.

However, he remained perfectly motionless; and after a second or two Starbuck spoke again, but it was not until Nick observed that he had been reading some silent signs that were being made from the position behind him where he could not himself see.

"Carter," said Starbuck then. His voice was strangely low and hoarse; beads of sweat stood out upon his forehead, showing that he was laboring under a great strain; his face was white and drawn, and during the last few moments it had become as haggard as a dead man's; his arms were strained, so that the muscles of his hands stood out like cords, where he grasped the arms of the chair in which he was seated, and if ever the detective had seen abject fright perfectly depicted in the countenance of a man, he saw it in Starbuck now. "Carter," he repeated, "answer me without moving a muscle, save to speak. Promise me that you will do that. I beg that you will."

"Very well," said the detective, without moving. "Go on."

"You promise?"

"Yes."

"Answer my questions as shortly as possible; will you?"

"Yes."

"When you make a promise you always keep it, do you not?"

"Yes."

"You never deviate from that, do you?"

"Not if human possibilities can prevent a deviation."

"I want you to make me a promise now, Carter. I ask it with my whole soul in the request. Will you do it?"

"I will hear first what it is, Starbuck."

"You must promise me, you must!"

"Tell me what it is that you wish me to promise you."

"In a moment. I find—I suppose you realize that there is some—something behind you that you cannot see, don't you?"

"I am beginning to think so; yes. What is it? A ghost?"

"Don't joke! For goodness' sake, don't joke! There is something behind you. It is threatening you with instant death unless you do exactly as I say."

"It sounds absurd; but go on."

There is no denying that the detective was uneasy. It is true that it was all that he could do to keep himself in hand so that he did not turn about in spite of the warning.

"Go on," he repeated.

"I find that I must leave the room for a moment," continued Starbuck, in that same low, tense tone that was husky with terror—terror that showed in his eyes and in his general demeanor. "I must leave the room for a few moments." He hesitated, as if he were watching for a sign or signal from the thing that was behind Nick; and then he went on: "I must go from the room for—fifteen—twenty—yes, twenty minutes. You can see the clock from where you sit. It is over my head."

"Yes."

"Look at the clock. What time is it?"

"Twenty minutes past five."

"Exactly?"

"Yes."

"I want you to promise me—I want you to give me your word of honor as a man and a gentleman that you will remain seated exactly as you are now, without moving or attempting to turn your head, without raising a finger or doing anything more than to turn your eyes in their sockets, until the clock points to a quarter to six."

"That will be twenty-five minutes," said Nick.

"Promise me, Carter! Promise me!"

"But why?"

"It is your life—and mine."

"Are you sure, Starbuck, do you know what you are talking about?"

"Yes, yes, yes!"

"I think that you have suddenly gone daffy. I am not one to be frightened by ghosts, or by strange appearances, and I judge that there is something strange behind me now. It cannot be a serpent, for they don't raise that sort of thing here, and this isn't the time of year nor the place for one. It can't be——"

"Promise me, Carter. Don't joke. It is my own life as well as yours that I ask for."

Starbuck put out his hands as if to ward off a blow, and then he almost shrieked out:

"Promise! Promise! *Quick!*"

"All right," said Nick, who really began to think that Starbuck had suddenly lost his reason. "I promise. Now, what? Are you going at once?"

Starbuck sank back into his chair, and for a moment appeared to be too greatly overcome to speak at all; but, after a moment, he raised himself and again stared past the detective toward that unknown quantity that was behind him.

"Starbuck," said the detective quietly, "I have been told that I have a sweet temper. I may as well tell you now that the statement is not true. I have a beastly temper, but, fortunately for others, and for my own reputation, I have it under excellent control. But, all the same, I am rapidly losing power over it. I shall get angry presently, if you continue to conduct yourself in this manner. You seem to be consulting somebody or something that is behind me every time you speak. Now, what in the world is it? Is it a man?"

Starbuck hesitated to reply. His eyes were fixed upon some object behind the detective; but at last he slowly shook his head in the negative.

"It is not a man, then?" repeated Nick.

"No," said Starbuck.

"An animal?"

"No."

"Is it a person?"

"Yes."

"Then it must be a woman. Is it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm not exactly afraid of a woman."

"You have promised me not to move," Starbuck shrieked out.

"I'm keeping my promise, am I not? I'm already sorry that I made it, but I will keep it. You said that you were going from the room? Why don't you go?"

"I'm not—quite ready—yet."

"No? So it is a woman who is behind me, eh? Has she a revolver aimed at the back of my head, or a dagger aimed at my heart through my back? Or does she hold a bludgeon over my head, ready to strike?"

"If you could see the table without turning your head—if you could see the spot where the poisoned dart was left without moving," replied Starbuck slowly, "you would know that it has been removed; that it is [illegible]."

"Ah! So that is what I am threatened with, is it?"

"Yes. Now I am going."

"You will return—at a quarter to six?"

The answer came slowly, and not until after Starbuck had received some signal from behind the detective. Then he replied:

"Yes."

"Am I still to be threatened with that dart after you have left the room?" asked Nick.

Again there was hesitation before the answer came, and then it was:

"No."

"I am glad of that, if you wish me to keep the promise." said the detective grimly, "for I should have considered that the menace, with you absent from the room, exonerated me from the terms of the promise. As it is, I will keep it. Now go, if you are going."

"After we—after I have gone, you may move about the room, if you care to do so, but your promise must hold good that you will not attempt to leave the room, will not open the door, and will not communicate with anybody outside the room, after I have gone out."

"Oh, very well. It is all one. It is merely an effort on the part of the person who is behind me to make good her escape—since you say it is a woman—before I can have an opportunity to follow. But you may inform her that I shall follow later, and shall ask the meaning of this little scene. I'll find her, too, for I suspect——"

Starbuck had risen from his chair while Nick was talking, and had passed around the detective until he was out of Nick's sight; and now the door closed, and Nick understood that he was alone.

Instantly availing himself of the permission to move as soon as he should be alone, and desperately regretting that he had made a promise not to pursue, he leaped to his feet then and turned.

There was nothing there at all.

As far as appearance went the room was in exactly the condition it had been in when he first entered it to have his interview with Starbuck.

He remembered now that he had not heard a sound prior to the sudden strange actions of his companion. He recalled the fact that there had been no noise of any kind. The intruder, whoever it might have been, must have approached with a tread that was absolutely noiseless; must have opened the door without a sound; must have taken up the position behind the detective with the stealth of an Indian; must have——

He broke off in his conjectures with a laugh.

"What is the use of thinking at all about it?" he asked himself. "When Starbuck returns, I will put him through a very good imitation of the Third Degree. I am a fool to make the promise I did, but now that it is given, I must stick to it."

Then he bit his lip with vexation, for another question had occurred to him.

"What if Starbuck should not return?" he asked himself.

But he dismissed that idea at once as senseless.

A man of the prominence of Starbuck could not be made to disappear from the midst of his haunts thus mysteriously. It was folly to suppose such a thing as that.

Nevertheless, the detective was uneasy.

When he was not studying the floor where the intruder had doubtless stood, his eyes were upon the hands of the clock; and never had the works of a clock moved so slowly.

From beyond the walls of the room he could hear the murmur of the usual noises; inside the room absolute silence reigned.

But while the minute-hand of the clock continued to move there came no sign of the return of Starbuck; and, at last, when the hand did point to a quarter to six, the detective sprang to the door and turned the knob to open it.

CHAPTER VIII.

A MYSTERIOUS VALET.

The door, however, did not respond to the detective's touch upon it. It had been fastened from the outside when Starbuck, with his unknown and mysterious companion, passed through it.

Nick did not remember that he had heard the bolt of the lock shoot into place, but he did not stop to consider that.

Locks held very little terror for him. He had never yet seen one that he could not get past if he tried, and so he lost no time in producing his small picklock from his pocket and tackling this one.

But he ceased almost at once and uttered a low whistle. The lock had not been employed in fastening the door.

Again the detective turned the knob and sought to open the door in the usual way, but again it resisted his efforts.

He did not think there could be a bolt on the outside; indeed, when he thought of it he remembered that there was not such a thing there.

How, then, had the door been fastened against him?

If it had happened that it opened outward, he would have lost no time in pondering upon the matter, for he would simply have thrown himself against it and so have forced it open; but to pull it open was a different thing.

He tried once more, but only to find that it held against the casing as firmly as if it had been screwed

fast with steel screws; and there was no other outlet to the room.

The door itself was made of heavy, seasoned oak; there was no transom; there was no window to the room which could be made available; in a word, there was no way out of the place at all unless he resorted to the expedient of destroying the door—and this he hesitated to do.

He returned to his seat near the table and remained there for fifteen minutes; and then, smarting under the impatience he felt, he determined that he would remain in the room no longer, even if he had to break the door apart piece by piece in the effort to obtain his liberty.

Resolved upon this, he approached the door again and seized the handle, and then he gave a jerk upon it which must have torn something apart, had there been the resistance he had encountered before.

But there was not.

The door came open in his grasp at once, and so forcible had he jerked upon it that he was nearly thrown to the floor as it came open in his hands.

"It seems," he mused, "that I am destined to be surrounded by mysteries to-day."

He paused long enough to examine the casing outside the door; but all that he could discover was one small hole where a screw had evidently penetrated the wood of the door, close to the jamb.

"An old trick," he mused, with a smile. "Somebody returned here after they went out, or one of them paused long enough to fasten an iron bar here with a single screw. That held the door when I tried to open it. But the point is that one of them, or somebody sent by them, returned here a moment ago to set me at liberty. Now, what in the world does it all mean? What sort of a cock-and-bull story was that one that Starbuck was trying to tell me about a sacred valley somewhere in India?

"This seems to be a day of blunders for me.

"I made the first one when I left the basement of this building without setting a watch upon that horse and the man who cared for it; I made the second one when I consented to sit still without turning my head, at the request of Starbuck; and it is certain now that there is no one running wildly about this building in search of Starbuck, or of the mysterious person who left this room with him.

"I don't even know that there was a person who left the room with him. I heard no sound. I have nothing to assure me that there was such a person, save the word of Starbuck; but why should he have lied to me about it?"

He stood there in the corridor for a time, lost in thought. Then he returned to Starbuck's desk and wrote a note, which he left upon it. It read:

"I must ask you—I must insist that the moment you read this, you will go to my house and wait there for my return, which will be soon. Just now I am going to the Hotel Mammoth; from there I shall go home."

He signed it and, leaving it on the desk where Starbuck would see it the moment he entered the room, he went out and hastened to the hotel.

Conner was there, obeying Nick's directions to the letter; and together they searched the room and the effects of the dead baron.

But they might as well have searched through the effects of a department store, for all the information they received.

Every article they found was new. There was not a piece of linen that bore so much as a laundry-mark. There was not a scrap of paper or a letter.

There was a trunk that was comparatively empty of clothing, and such clothing as it did contain was new, and offered nothing in explanation of the identity of the man. There was very little linen or underclothing in the dresser or in the closets of the room, and such as there was seemed also new, recently purchased, and bore no marks at all.

"I don't think," said the detective, when they had completed their search and were staring across the room at each other, "that I have ever encountered a situation where there was not something to suggest an idea until now. Here there is absolutely nothing. I haven't found but just one thing to pay us for coming here. Have you done more?"

"I haven't found even one thing, Nick," replied Conner. "To what do you refer?"

"Well, I suppose, in reality, I refer to what I haven't found. In other words, it is evident to me that somebody has visited these rooms since the baron went out; somebody other than ourselves. I mean by that, that I don't think the baron has taken all this trouble to conceal his identity. Somebody else has done it for him."

"Oh!"

"Probably the valet."

"Probably. I had not thought about it at all. If I had any thought about it, it was that the baron did it himself."

"No. It is much too thorough for that; and, besides, there are many evidences that some one other than himself did it. If he had done the thing himself, he would not have taken all the trouble that is evident here, to conceal the fact that it had been done. He would have been content with a mere obliteration of the marks which showed where things had been purchased; he would not have sought to conceal the fact that such obliteration had been done."

"You are right. But what do you make of it all? What sort of a case is it, anyhow?"

"I confess that I don't know, Con. It is the puzzle

about it all that interests me. I am going to work it out in my own private way, and—"

"All right. I am with you."

"I am glad that the newspaper men got the idea that the death of the baron was only an accident. I do not want the fact that a murder was committed to creep out just yet. Are you sure, Con, that there is no inkling of it?"

"Perfectly sure—yes."

"Let it go at that, for the present. Now we will find out for ourselves what they know about the baron here in the hotel—but I expect it is as little as we know now."

And it was.

All that could be ascertained was that Baron Sternfeldt had arrived at the hotel four days before; that he had registered as already described; that he had brought a valet with him; that the valet had not been seen around the hotel since the morning of the preceding day; that the baron had gone out that morning, ostensibly to visit the horse show, and had not returned.

Nick asked if anybody had inquired for him; and the reply was that nobody had done so.

"Did he receive any caller at all since he has been here?" asked the detective.

"If he did so, the fact is not known at the desk. He seemed strangely alone."

"What sort of an appearing man was the valet?" asked Nick.

"He was rather a remarkable-looking fellow," replied the clerk. "He did not, in fact, have the appearance of a servant at all; but rather that of a gentleman who was dressed up to represent one."

"Was he also a German?"

"No; I think not; although he might have been. He was a very handsome man; an unusual-looking man."

"What is it that was so remarkable about him?"

"Well, Mr. Carter, while he was unquestionably a blonde—that is, his hair was almost as white as the white hair that comes only with age, he was still a young man, and his eyes were as black as sloe berries."

The detective started.

Here was a description which tallied with the one that was given him by Starbuck of the people who lived in that swampy place he had referred to as the Sacred Valley.

"How old a man was he?" asked Nick.

"He was a young man—quite young, I should say."

"Thirty?"

"Twenty, rather."

"That would be nothing but a boy."

"Well, you might call him a boy rather than a man."

"Did he have any beard on his chin or lip?"

"He wore a suggestion of one. In fact—"

"Well?"

"The valet might have been a young woman disguised as a man. The thought never took shape in my mind before, but since it has come up between us I wonder that it did not."

"Do you mean that you seriously think that the valet might have been a girl disguised as a man?"

"Yes; almost. Of course, if such a thing had been even suspected while they were here—"

"Oh, I know what you would say in reference to that. What I do wish to know is, Are you making that statement seriously about the possibility that the valet was a woman?"

"I am."

"What name did the valet answer to?"

"I never heard but one, and that from a bell-boy who heard the baron call to his servant. He addressed him as 'Idayah.'"

"That is a strange name," said the detective. "Are you quite sure about what the hall-boy told you?"

"Quite."

"Idayah. I-d-a-y-a-h. Is that the way you would spell it?"

"Yes."

"White hair, black eyes, handsome face—tall, or short?"

"Rather tall, I should say. Somewhat taller than you are. About my own height, possibly."

"A foreigner?"

"Without doubt."

"Spoke English?"

"I never heard the valet utter a word, nor does one of the employees here remember to have done so. He was a very silent individual. He might have been dumb, for all I know."

Again the detective was startled by the coincidence. First, the 'white-haired people with black eyes,' and now a 'silent people.' Both were expressions that had been used by Starbuck during the recital of his interrupted story.

Nick Carter began to wonder if he was ever to hear the end of that particular story.

"Come, Con," he said abruptly, "we will get about our business," and to the clerk he added:

"If that valet, or any person like him, shows up here again, I'll give you a hundred dollars out of my own pocket to detain him until you can send for me."

CHAPTER IX.

THE ONLY CLUE IN THE CASE.

Gerald Starbuck did not return.

When Nick stepped up to the office where the detectives made his headquarters during the continuance of the horse show Starbuck had not returned to it.

The note that Nick had written and placed on his desk was still there.

No person around the building had seen him. Nick Carter himself was the last one who had any knowledge of him.

Nick tried to fix the time as closely as he could when Starbuck left the office to go out with the mysterious stranger who had been standing behind the detective's chair, and he could do so within a very few minutes, as we know; but nobody had seen him go out; nobody had seen him in company with any stranger that afternoon; nobody had, in fact, seen him at all, after the moment when the detective went with him to his little office.

And he did not return.

Nick waited around the building for him himself; and, later, he posted Conner to await him; but the evening and then the night passed without the coming of Starbuck.

Starbuck was known to occupy bachelor quarters at the Amphion apartments, and at midnight the detective decided to go there in search of him, thinking that, perhaps, the strange occurrence in the office, when Starbuck was so palpably terrified, might have upset him so that he had gone home and gone to bed.

But he was not at the Amphion; had not been there at all since the morning when he had left there to go to the Garden.

"If he should return at any time during the night," said Nick, as he turned away, "please tell him that I would like him to call me up on the phone as soon as he gets to his room."

Nick went home then, sorely puzzled. He had been "up against" puzzles during his experience which had tried him sorely; but never had he faced one so utterly without an explanation as this one.

Joseph, his own valet, was seated in his accustomed chair, fast asleep, when Nick opened the door; but he sprang to his feet at once with many apologies. *Joseph has never been known to sleep at his post before.*

"How long have you been sleeping, Joseph?" asked the detective, with some show of severity.

"Not long, sir. It cannot be long. It was only a moment ago that I sat down there. What time is it, sir?"

"Two o'clock in the morning, Joseph."

"*What, sir?*"

"It is one o'clock. What time did you seat yourself there and fall asleep?"

"I am ashamed to confess it, sir, but I must. I looked at the time, thinking that you would be home presently. It was ten o'clock."

"So you have slept three hours, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"And have been dreaming that Chick, or Patsy, or Ten-Ichi did not awaken you? Have they gone out and not returned?"

"I was waiting here at the door to give you a message from Mr. Chick, sir. He told me to tell you that he had decided to take Patsy and Ten-Ichi with him, and would return by two or three in the morning, he thought."

"Take Patsy and Ten-Ichi with him—where?"

"I supposed you knew, sir. Mr. Chick spoke as if you would know."

"Very well. You have had about three hours' sleep, Joseph, so you may remain up for Chick. I want you to tell him to come to me the moment he arrives."

The detective ascended the stairs to his study then; but the instant he crossed the threshold and turned on the electric switch he knew that somebody other than members of his household had entered that room since he left it.

It was not that anything had been moved or displaced; it was rather a feeling—an intuitive sense that he had, that such was the case; and he was presently to know that it was so.

As he approached the desk he discovered that a sealed envelope was lying upon it, addressed to himself; and even as he raised it in his hand and broke the seal, something told him that the message was from Starbuck, though why he should have thought so was not clear, for he did not remember that he had ever seen Starbuck's handwriting. It was certain that he did not recognize it at the moment.

But he broke the seal and opened the letter.

It was from Starbuck, and it was rather incoherent, too. Nick could make but little more out of it than he had been able to do with the other mysteries with which he had been confronted since he entered the Garden that afternoon.

It began abruptly:

"You must not look for me, Carter. It will do no good. I am in great trouble. I am to take a journey; a long journey. God only knows if I will ever return; I do not. I am sorry that I had to leave you as I did. I am worried about the show. Try to make some excuse for my disappearance, will you? There's a good fellow. Tell them anything but the truth. I would not have them know that for anything. Don't look for me. Don't try to follow me. You will only be killed for your pains, as that poor fellow in the Garden was. I am—— I must not write any more. It won't do. Good-by. If I should never see you again—— I cannot write any more—— STARBUCK."

"Well," mused the detective, "I have heard of incoherent letters, but that one wins the blue ribbon. Now, what in the world does it all mean?"

He sat there for a long time, pondering deeply, and until the hands of the clock had ticked themselves

around to two; and then, as he was about to rise, he heard the street-door open and close again, and, supposing that Chick had returned, he stepped out into the hall to call to him.

But it was not Chick, for he could hear Joseph's voice in conversation with a stranger, and, feeling that the caller had brought him some sort of a message, the detective hurried down the stairs.

It was an American District messenger boy, from the office at the corner of Twenty-third Street and Eighth Avenue; and he held forth an envelope to the detective, with the remark:

"No answer, sir. I was to be sure that you received it."

He was turning away to leave the house again when Nick detained him.

"What a moment," he said. Then he broke the seal and read: He not until he had read a message that was scrawled on the outside of the envelope, which said: "Please deliver this to Nick Carter. Keep the money."

The message inside the envelope was:

"CARTER: For God's sake, save me. Remember my story that I could not finish. The word Kolara is the only clue I can give you. I do not know what it means. I am in the hands of Idayali. STARBUCK."

The detective unclasped his shoulders and replaced the message inside the envelope, when he again read what was written on the outside.

"Where did you find this message?" he asked of the messenger then.

"In the middle of the street, sir."

"Where?"

"Almost in front of the office where I work—Eighth Avenue and Twenty-third Street. It was lying in the middle of the street. I was just returning from an errand."

"There was money wrapped around it?" asked Nick.

"Yes, sir. A ten-dollar bill. It said keep the money if I delivered the message."

"That is all right. You may keep the ten dollars. How long is it since you found it?"

"Less than an hour, sir."

"You did not see it thrown from a carriage window?"

"No, simply found it in the street?"

"A carriage had just passed, sir. I did not see the party throw out it, but it occurred to me I thought that it might have come from that carriage. That is why it would not have been long in the street right there, where so many are passing, without being found."

"That is true. Which way was the carriage going?"

"Toward the river, sir. The North River."

The detective permitted the messenger to depart then; but as soon as he was gone he said to Joseph:

"I must go out again at once. When Chick returns—or either of the others—tell them to wait up for me in expectation of a telephone-message."

"At last," he mused, as he hurried into the street, "I have got something to cling to. I know, at least, that the so-called valet, Idayali, is at the bottom of this entire affair; and I must suppose that since the carriage was driving westward through Twenty-third Street it was making for the ferry—the Pennsylvania or the Erie. It is possible that at this hour of the morning I may be able to get some trace of them."

It was not far from Nick Carter's house to Madison Square, and there the detective knew he would be able to find a conveyance; and he was soon seated in a hansom, driving with all speed toward the West Twenty-third Street ferry.

Then he set himself to the effort of trying to collect and bring together the scattered threads of the affair, first giving his attention to the two notes.

The one he had found awaiting him in his study he believed he could explain.

"Starbuck was permitted to write that," was his thought. "His captors stood over him while he did it, careful that he should say nothing they did not wish him to say. But it is possible that they thought that the injunction not to search for Starbuck would be obeyed; and then one of them undertook to deliver the message. But here I am confronted by another problem. How did the man who delivered that message get into the house? How was Chick, as well as Patsy and Ten-Ichi, first drawn away from the house? How was Joseph put to sleep without creating a suspicion in his mind? And, lastly, how did the person who brought the message there know where my private room was located inside the house?

"There are four important questions for me to think out.

"Now, as to the second message, Starbuck has been left to himself long enough to write it. He probably had a sheet of paper and pencil-stub in his pocket; but one may count them for convenience and economy. He

also had the money, and, having written the note and fastened the bill under the flap of the envelope, he waited his chance to throw it into the street.

"But what is it all about? *'Remember my story that I could not finish.'* Does that mean that Starbuck's captors have started with him for Nepal, in the heart of the Asiatic continent, at the foot of the Himalayas? Or does it mean only that he has fallen into the power of people who come from that country? Gee! I wish he had had time to finish that story. *'The word Kolara is the only clue I can give you—I do not know what it means.'* Well, neither do I. It might be the name of a mountain, a river, a town, or a temple in Nepal; it might be the name of a man—or a boat; it might be anything at all. 'I am in the hands of Idayah.' Well, at least that means something. *'I am in the hands of Idayah'* means that the valet to the murdered baron is the main gazabo in this game; it means that the name is not unknown to Starbuck; it means that Starbuck doesn't remember exactly how far he had progressed in the telling of that story to me, and now thinks that he had already mentioned Idayah; *and the whole thing means that from the horse called 'Arab,' down to the hostler whose name was 'Mudge,' the people of that strange place called 'The Sacred Valley' are responsible for everything that has happened in connection with this affair to-day.*"

The hansom in which he was riding stopped at the ferry-house, and he sprang out and hastened forward, entering the Pennsylvania station first; but he stopped at the ticket-window after he had paid his fare.

"I am Nick Carter," he said to the man on duty. "I am after a party which must have gone over by this ferry, or by the Erie, within an hour. I will describe them as well as I can, and I will be greatly obliged to you if you can put me upon the right track."

CHAPTER X.

IDAYAH, THE MYSTERY.

The detective began with a graphic description of [illegible] and he had not finished before the man [illegible] office interrupted him.

"I think that the gentleman you are describing crossed by the last boat," he said. "If you could give me an idea of the people who were with him, I would be positive."

"[illegible] what I cannot do," replied Nick. "I have never seen the others of the party, and so I am not sure about one of them. How many were in the party with the gentleman you think I am describing?"

"Three besides himself."

"I should say that the most noticeable feature about them would have been their eyes. The eyes should have been very dark and brilliant. They should have impressed you as being foreigners, I think; but without having anything particularly and distinctively foreign about them. If the leader of the party was the one I think it was, his hair should have been very light; so blond as to be almost white, and——"

The ticket agent interrupted the detective.

"Was there a woman in the party?" he asked.

"I don't know. There might have been. Why?"

"Because you have given a very good description of the woman who was with them. It was she who approached the window first, and who paid the fares. She was the most beautiful woman I ever saw, I think—that is, the most strangely beautiful. Her hair was almost as white as snow, and yet it was not the same white that comes with age. Rather, it was a perfectly natural white. Her skin, too, was almost as white as her hair, only there was a healthy, wholesome glow about it; and her eyes were as black as night."

"There is no doubt about them now," said Nick. "They went on the last boat, you say?"

"Yes."

"How long ago was that?"

"Thirty-five minutes."

"When is the next boat?"

"In ten minutes."

"You have a telephone there, haven't you, which communicates with the office in Jersey City, sir?"

"Yes. You may use it, Mr. Carter. Come around and step inside. It is against the rules, but I think in this instance I can stretch them a little."

Over the telephone-wire Nick gave a description of the party to the agent at the other end; he asked that they be searched for around the station, and, if found, that a policeman be asked to detain them as suspicious persons until his arrival. Then he called up police headquarters in Jersey City, and, having told who he was, asked that two special detectives be sent at once to the station of the Pennsylvania road to meet him there upon his arrival, and to arrest and hold the party of four

if they could be found: and being assured that all his directions would be attended to, he returned to the ticket agent.

"The man whom I first described to you," he said, "is Mr. Gerald Starbuck, a prominent society swell of New York. I want you to describe to me, as nearly as possible, just how he acted during the time you saw him. They must have been forced to wait here a little time for the boat by which they crossed the river. Tell me what you noticed about the conduct of any of the party, please."

"I wouldn't have noticed the party at all, Mr. Carter, had it not been for the startling character of the beauty of the woman. I don't think she was more than twenty years old—certainly not much more than that. She had the brightest and blackest eyes I ever saw; and the blondest hair I ever saw; and the pinkest skin I ever saw, where it was not whiter than her hair. She was dressed modestly, but, nevertheless, in the height of fashion. She wore beautiful furs, although the night is not cold."

Nick nodded. "Go on," he said.

"The gentleman you say was Mr. Starbuck acted as if he had been drinking more than was good for him. He was unsteady on his feet, and his eyes were glazed and dim, as if he could hardly keep them open. He walked quietly beside the others, and did not utter a word that I could hear. He passed through with them, with one of the men of the party on either side of him. I did not see any of them after they passed through, and I think they went at once on the boat which was waiting at the time."

"What about the remaining two men of the party?" asked the detective.

"I scarcely noticed them more than to suppose, at random, that one of them was the woman's brother, because his hair and eyes were like hers. He was tall and slender and handsome. He made me think of the caged animals one sees at the Zoo, he was so supple in his motions."

"And the other? The remaining man of the party?"

"He was totally unlike any of the others. He was dark and swarthy. He was unmistakably a foreigner. I should say, merely guessing, that he was a Hindu. I have seen men like him, wearing turbans, often crossing this ferry. Your boat is ready, Mr. Carter. It will leave in five minutes."

When the detective arrived at the Jersey City end of the ferry he found two detectives awaiting him—or, rather, they were officers in plain clothes; and with them was one of the regular policemen stationed at the terminal.

But none of them had any information about the people for whom the detective was searching; nor could any person be found around the station who remembered having seen them.

They had not been seen to leave the boat at all, and suddenly it occurred to Nick that possibly he might have committed what he would call another blunder—for with him it seemed as if the past day had been one of blunders. It was possible that the party had not left the boat at all, but had returned to New York.

"Wait a moment," he said, "until I question the deck-hands on this boat. I suppose it is the same one that came over on the last trip, isn't it?"

"Yes," was the reply. "There is only one boat running on that route at this time of the night."

But here, again, he was disappointed.

When he had succeeded in grouping the deck-hands together, and describing to them the appearance of the party he sought, there were two who remembered distinctly having seen them, because of the strange character of the woman's beauty; but they had not been noticed leaving the boat, and it was equally positive that they had not returned to New York aboard of it.

"I know that they did not remain on the boat," said one of the deck-hands, who acted as spokesman for the others, "for the reason that it was my turn to make the tour of the cabins. If anybody remains aboard the boat to return, we have to collect a return fare. Those four people could not have hidden away from me, even if they had tried to do so, and I know that I did not collect a fare for that return trip. In fact, I know that they were not aboard when we went to New York on the last trip."

It seemed to Nick Carter, as he turned away, that he had found a clue merely to lose it again, and, having ascertained that there was still half an hour before the boat would return to New York again, he thanked the two city detectives and the policeman for their interest in the matter, and strolled away from them, at last going out of the station upon the streets of the city.

It was then between three and four o'clock in the morning. The detective was weary, disgusted, and dis-

appointed. He wished to be alone to think it over, although he was tired of thinking, and well-nigh out of conceit with himself entirely.

He walked up the street a little way and paused upon a corner, with his hands in his pockets and his head lowered, when suddenly he was roused out of his reverie by a hack, which whirled around the corner so near to the curb that he was obliged to leap backward to protect his knees from the passing hub of the wheels.

And as he started back, with an impatient exclamation at the driver for his carelessness on the tip of his tongue to utter, he was startled into total forgetfulness of his narrow escape by the fleeting flash-light glimpse he obtained of the occupants of the hack.

A pair of glowing black eyes had peered out at him for that instant; a gleam of hair that was almost white shone under the picture-hat that the woman wore; and, beyond it all, there was a fleeting vision of a man who was lying back against the cushions as if he were asleep—and then the carriage was gone, and the vision with it.

But Nick Carter had seen enough.

The vision was the same as if he had been standing in utter darkness, and a flash of lightning had illumined a scene in front of him for the briefest fraction of an instant—if an instant of time may be divided into fractions.

But it had been enough.

He saw and he recognized a face that he had never seen before as perfectly as if he was quite familiar with it; and even if he had not done so, he was positive that the vision of the unconscious man inside the hack had exposed the features of Gerald Starbuck.

The carriage had not moved thirty feet beyond him before he was in full chase; but, nevertheless, it gained upon him perceptibly, and had whirled around a corner and disappeared before he could have counted ten.

And when he reached that corner and turned to pursue it had gained still more, and was already rounding the next corner; and the driver was half-standing upon the box of the hack, plying his whip upon the horses, and urging them to greater speed.

Nick felt as if this would be almost the last chance he would ever have to solve the many mysteries of that case, and he exerted himself to his utmost speed in the pursuit.

If any person who reads this has ever tried to pursue a pair of running horses, he will know something of the difficulties that Nick Carter had to face then, and he will understand the impossibility of overtaking the hack; but Nick was determined to pursue it just as long as there was the slightest possibility of following in its wake.

After that last turn made by the hack it kept straight up the street toward the Heights, with the horses still running at their utmost speed; and at that hour in the morning there was nothing to impede its progress; nothing to stop them; nobody to see the chase or to offer the detective any assistance.

He regretted now that he had not thought to use one of his pistols in an effort to stop the horses. He might have shot one of them: now it was too late for that, for they were already practically out of range.

And then the detective's luck, which seemed totally to have deserted him that day, returned to help him.

It was the hour for milk-wagons to be abroad; the hour for marketmen and green-grocers to be seeking their wares for the day.

The hack horses were practically running away by now, and the driver was still standing on his box, plying his whip and urging them to even greater speed; and the hack was swaying from side to side of the thoroughfare while the horses dashed madly onward.

And then from out of one of the side street the luck came.

It approached in the form of a lumbering milk-wagon; a covered vehicle drawn by two gray horses, which trotted amiably into the perspective directly in the track of the running team, and therefore into a crashing collision, which mixed the four horses into a struggling mass of kicking legs and heaving bodies, which scattered milk-cans in every direction, and which, by the noise of the impact, roused the entire neighborhood.

Nick Carter was about a city block distant from the scene of the accident, but he was running with all the speed he could muster toward it.

It happened to be a dark spot where the accident happened. For some unknown reason the arc-light at the corner had gone out; but, nevertheless, as Nick ran forward he could see that one figure leaped from the wrecked hack to the street and sped away out of sight into the one from which the milk-wagon had come, and that it was the woman who had thus attempted to make good her escape he knew.

He knew more than that, too; for he was satisfied

that the woman was Idayah, the valet; Idayah, the murderess; Idayah, the mystery.

CHAPTER XI.

THE PICTURE IN THE DOORWAY.

When the detective dashed up to the scene of the wreck the driver of the milk-wagon was standing in the midst of it all, swearing frightfully; the hack-driver was lying on his face on the pavement, unconscious or killed, and the hack itself was a total wreck.

But Nick devoted only a glance to these things.

The man of the milk-wagon saw him approaching and ceased his cursing long enough so that Nick could call out to him in passing.

"Look out for the man who is inside that hack. Stay here with him till I return, and I will pay all damages," he shouted; and then he dashed around the corner in pursuit of the woman whom he intended should not escape now, if he could prevent it.

But as he turned the corner he stopped abruptly.

The distance from there to the next corner was considerable, and the lights were so that he could see quite plainly for the entire length of the block, *and there was no woman in sight anywhere.*

There was nothing in sight, in fact, save another hack, which was standing quietly against the curb in front of a house not a hundred feet distant from him.

Nick stopped only for a single instant; then he moved on again and went straight to the motionless carriage, where the driver appeared to be soundly sleeping at his post on the box, and this of itself was sufficient to rouse the suspicions of the detective, for the noise of the collision that had just occurred should have aroused him.

But the detective did not trouble to wake the man and question him. He was satisfied that he was only feigning sleep, and, therefore, if he answered questions at all, he would do so only in a misleading manner.

But he pulled open the door of the hack and peered inside.

It was empty.

The detective was on the point of withdrawing his head from the interior of the hack, determined now to compel the man on the box to answer questions, when he felt a sudden whirr of air past his cheek, and something flew past him and buried itself in the cushions of the carriage; and he saw in that single instant what it was that had so narrowly missed him, for the queer winglike haft of the strange weapon that had pierced the baron's side could not be mistaken; and this was the same instrument, or one exactly like it.

Nick started backward and managed to leap to one side in time to avoid a blow that was aimed at him from behind, and with a blow of his fist, which a pugilist would have called an upper hook, he sent the supposed sleeping driver sprawling to the ground.

And then, as he turned to face other foes, he discovered that there were none.

The street was as deserted as before. There was still the wreck at the corner, where now several men, and, among them, a policeman, had appeared, but save for that there was not a moving object in sight.

Nick knew that the driver of the hack who had pretended to be asleep, and who was now unconscious, could not have thrown the dart at him, and from its position in the cushion of the hack he reasoned that it must have come from the house before which the vehicle was standing.

And, yet, there was not a sign of life about the house; there was no window open from which the missile could have been thrown; the front door was closed, and the grilled door under the steps, which led into the basement, was closed and apparently fastened.

But already the policeman who had appeared at the wreck on the corner was running toward him, and he came up puffing and panting with his unusual exertions.

It did not take long for the detective to make the policeman understand who he was, and then, snapping a pair of handcuffs upon the still unconscious driver, he asked the officer to remain on guard there until he returned, and without more words he dashed up the steps to the front door of the house.

Nor did he stop here to ring the bell or to pound upon the door.

He tried it and found that it was locked, as he had expected it would be; but his picklock was handy, and while you might have counted ten he had both doors open and had stepped inside the hallway.

Here there was a dim light burning, although the house itself was as silent as a tomb; but the detective was not deceived by that, since he was positive that the dart that had been thrown at him could have proceeded from no other place than that particular house.

That there was somebody awake there, and very much awake, he was certain.

He turned the light up as far as it would go. Then he called back to the policeman to stop anybody who tried to leave the place, and to use his pistol if necessary to enforce his orders, and then he opened the doors into the parlor and peered inside.

There was no one there; but glass doors separated that room from the one to the rear of it, and beyond the glass doors he could see that another light was burning.

He started forward, intending to throw open those doors without warning of any kind, when they flew open before him, and at the same instant electric lights flashed into being, seemingly, from every side of the room at once.

Nick Carter halted in his advance; halted directly in the center of the room, for in the center of those folding doors so suddenly opened, framed by the square casing and as much in a flood of light as if the scene were intended for an exhibition picture, stood the woman of the search.

Nick had heard her beauty several times referred to that night; he had supposed that it was something out of the ordinary; but he was in no way prepared for what he saw.

A perfect blonde could not well have sloe-black eyes—and yet here was a perfect blonde who did possess them; but, after all, her superlative beauty was not the astounding part of the scene to the detective. It was her costume which surprised him most.

He had pursued her when she was in the escaping hack; he had seen her leap from that equipage and run down the street; he had followed her; he had almost been the victim of a supposedly poisoned dart, which had been thrown at him not five minutes before, from that very house, and probably by her hand, and yet here she was, dressed as if she had not been out of her room that night; dressed as if she had leaped from her bed and thrown on a loose wrapper and to don a pair of slippers, having been suddenly roused from sleep by the noise the detective had made in entering the house.

And her acting, too, was perfect.

Her eyes were wide and frightened; her hair was just as much disheveled as it might have been had the condition she was trying to counterfeit actually been true; and the half of a big, long pistol in her hand, which she pointed toward the detective, but which trembled in her grasp, as if the mere metal shivered out of her ken.

For a moment Nick was nonplused. He had that sense of repugnance of intrusion upon the privacy of a woman in her own house which all men must feel at such a time.

For just one instant he stopped in his tracks; for just one moment he hesitated; but then he continued his advance toward her, unmindful of the wavering weapon she held in her grasp.

"It won't do, madam," he said coldly. "You are wonderful at lightning changes, as well as in other things, but, all the same, you are my prisoner. Drop that pistol!"

Instead of obeying him—instead of dropping the pistol—she pulled the trigger, for Nick saw the movement of the muscles of her forearm as she did so; but he saw no more than that, for instantly he was blinded by an opaque powder that was shot from its muzzle upon him; blinded and staggered at the same time, for he was half suffocated as well; and it seemed as if the powder had the power or the quality of blotting out from view everything that had been before him.

It was only an instant, to be sure; but the picture of the woman framed in the doorway, with the glowing brightness of the room beyond it, and with the illumination surrounding him, disappeared as if by magic, and then came darkness, utter and complete.

He had the sensation of having been suddenly struck blind, only there was no pain with it all; the strange powder had half-suffocated him for an instant, but even that sensation did not last; but every light in the house seemed to have gone out as suddenly as they had appeared.

At once Nick dashed his hand into his pocket and drew forth his electric search-light, and he knew that no more than half a dozen seconds could have passed since the figure of the woman, pistol in hand, had been framed in the doorway; but when he pressed upon the button and threw a gleam of brilliancy through the open folding doors there was no one there, the room beyond was deserted—there was nothing, absolutely nothing, to bar his further progress.

With a bound he reached the threshold, believing that the woman had only retreated into the back parlor, which he supposed to be a bedroom; but when he entered it there was no one there; the room itself was empty, [illegible] and it proved to be merely an

ordinary back parlor of a very ordinary house supplied with very common furnishings.

It needed only a glance to tell him that the woman had somehow made her escape during that interval of a few seconds when he had been blinded and partly suffocated by the powder she had shot upon him from the tiny weapon she had carried, and it needed only a second one to apprise him of the fact that the small door which led from that room into the main hall of the house was open, and that the woman had doubtless taken that way out.

He ran to it and passed through. The street-door at the front of the house was still open, as he had left it upon entering.

He hastened on that, and looked out upon the street—and then he leaped down the steps to the side of the policeman he had left on guard, who was slowly rising to his feet, rubbing his eyes and swearing like a trooper.

"Where is she?" demanded the detective.

"Search me!" exclaimed the officer. "She shoved a gun into me face and pulled the trigger, and, faith, me eyes went out like that;" and he snapped his fingers. "That's all I know," he added.

The detective looked up and down the street. There was not a person in sight, save those who had gathered in the corner about the wreck, and Nick decided if the woman could have had time to go that far before he followed her out of the house.

The adjoining houses were closed as tightly as they had been before his entrance into this one, and yet the woman had vanished, as if by magic.

"There was only one way for her to do that," muttered the detective. "She took the time to come out here to throw me off the scent, *and then she ran back into the same house.* Officer?"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you all right now?"

"I am; bet, sure, I thought I was blinded."

"Have you a gun with you?"

"I have."

"I am going back into the house. Wait here. If I come out in a——"

"Faith, I'll blind her two eyes for her if she does that. I'm not sure that she's a woman, for——" He stopped, for Nick had already turned back up the steps and disappeared into the house.

It was still as dark as midnight inside. There was not a ray of light anywhere, for even that one in the hallway had been extinguished.

But the detective still had his own trustworthy search-light in his grasp, and he was at that moment about as near to being as impatiently angry as he ever allowed himself to become.

That the woman was still somewhere inside that house, he did not doubt, and that she should not again escape him, he was determined; and then, that word which Starbuck had written in the letter, and also the name of the woman he was pursuing, came to him; and following some impulse which he could not have defined he paused for an instant upon the threshold and called out:

"Kolara! Idayah! Kolara!"

CHAPTER XII.

CORNERING A MYSTERY.

Nick Carter could not have explained why he called out those two words, or names, and he waited and listened after he uttered them.

The house, however, remained silent, and there was no answer to his call in any form.

The light he carried in his hand, although a powerful one, discharged only a single beam, like the fiery arm of a search-light from a war-ship.

Nick waved the light about in front of him, throwing it upon the stairs, through the door into the parlor, along the hall toward the door into the back parlor, everywhere; but it revealed nothing whatever to his expectant eyes.

Presently he stepped forward.

He knew that the woman could not be on the ground floor of the house, or, at least, was not likely to be there, the supposition being that after returning to the house when she left the policeman she had gone directly up the stairs to one of the upper floors.

He started forward to follow that idea; he rested his hand for an instant upon the balustrade, and as he did so he heard the street-door close softly behind him.

Instantly he wheeled, but he was not quick enough to avoid the attack upon him, for as he turned powerful arms were thrown around him, a heavy weight bore him to the floor despite his struggles, and something that was cold and clammy was thrown over his face—something that had been saturated with that same perfume which had been used to smother the bound lady.

But Nick Carter had the forethought to hold his breath—and he struggled mightily.

He tore the cloaky thing from his head and face; he struck out with his hands and kicked with his feet; he seized upon two arms that were holding him and tore them from the grasp they had upon him; he wrenched them fiercely, and shut his iron grip upon them with the mad strength of a giant—and he heard the owner of them cry out with pain, felt the grasp of them relax, heard a whimpering, shuddering cry, as if from a woman, and so struggled to his feet again, seizing, as he did so, a second figure with which his hands had come into contact.

He staggered against the wall in his struggle, and his disengaged hand came in contact with the electric switch, and instantly he turned it, with the result that every light in that part of the house was instantly turned on again—and he saw that he held in his grasp, not the woman of the doorway, but her counterpart in masculine attire.

"The valet!" he exclaimed, holding his captive the more tightly.

He could have sworn that at least three pairs of hands had seized upon him; he knew that a weight much greater than this valet could have brought to bear had borne him to the floor, and yet there was no other human being present there.

"I have got *you*, anyhow!" he said grimly. "You are Idayah, the valet. You are also the woman of the doorway, dressed up as a man. You are an expert at lightning changes, I see; but you probably wore that garb under your feminine apparel all the time. What have you got to say for yourself?"

"Nothing," was the calm reply; and it was the voice of a woman—a deep contralto, to be sure—that uttered the word.

Nick strode to the door and opened it, still maintaining his hold upon that slender arm; and he called out to the officer on guard outside:

"Rap for assistance, officer; I want two or three men here, to search this house from top to bottom." Then he turned about and led his captive into the back parlor.

"Are you Idayah?" he asked, then.

"Yes," was the calm reply.

"Did you serve as valet to Baron Sternfeldt?"

"Yes," she said again, indifferently, although there was a suggestion of a sneer in her manner, for it was a woman whom Nick had captured; there could be no doubt of that; and to the unbounded astonishment of the detective, she seemed to be perfectly self-possessed, not in the least disturbed by her capture, and utterly unmindful of the predicament in which she stood.

"You are a woman?" asked Nick.

"Yes," she replied, a third time; and, somehow, it annoyed the detective.

"Is that the only word of the English language that you are familiar with?" he demanded impatiently.

"It is sufficient for your purpose, isn't it?" she asked in return.

"Did you murder the baron?"

"Yes."

"Well, anyhow, I have got you now. There were two murderers, weren't there? One of them threw the same sort of a dart as that one with which you tried to kill me a little while ago, and the other one made use of a trained horse for the killing. Now, which one of those two were you?"

"Both."

Again that suggestion of a sneer. Again the calm reply. Again that outward seeming of utter indifference as to consequences. Nick tried another line of questions.

"You came across on the Twenty-third Street ferry a little while ago, didn't you?" he asked.

"Yes."

"And brought Starbuck with you?"

"Yes."

"There were two others with you; no? Two of your own kind? Two more white-haired, black-eyed murderers?" He thought he would anger her by that question, but he did not succeed, for she responded as indifferently as before:

"Yes."

"Where are those others now?" he asked, then.

She did not answer.

"Never mind," said the detective. "You need not reply if you don't care to do so. It is pretty certain that they have not left this house, and that they will be found when the officers arrive. They were here—I know that."

Again the smile played across the face of the woman dressed as a man; and then, very quietly, she said:

"I will make a statement to you, Mr. Carter, and after that I will say nothing. You had better hear what I

shall say, too, for you will have reason to remember it later on. I speak your language perfectly, as you see, and yet I was never in this country until a few days ago. I came here, not in pursuit of the man who was killed, and whom you speak of as Baron Sternfeldt, although he was already condemned to death, and I killed him when he was found; but I came for another purpose, which you have temporarily prevented me from fulfilling. I shall, however, carry it out at no distant day. I come from a country that you have never heard of; or, if you have, you have heard very little. I came for a purpose, and though you should arrest me many times, I will live to carry out that purpose. There is no prison made which may hold me a prisoner. I alone am responsible for the death of that man with the German name. It was I who threw the dart at the place called the Garden—and here. It was I who trained the horse to kill."

"How—why—"

"You need not ask me for explanations, for I will not give them. All that is necessary for you now [illegible] to explain them, you will only [illegible] I would have killed you many times to-night, while you were pursuing me, and after you came into this house. I chose not to do so [illegible].

"For you may take me to prison here. I shall probably remain there for a time, charged with these crimes, but *I will never pay the penalty.* Neither you nor others can hold me, and beware if you pursue me after I shall have escaped.

"You will find your friend, Mr. Starbuck, unhurt in the wrecked carriage at the corner. I left him there, as you know. You can find the man Mudge, who cared for my horse, if you search for him, but he is innocent of any crime, or of complicity in one. You have found me, and that is enough. I confess to the killing of the horse, who deserved death at my hands. Why, I will not tell you; who he really was, you need not know; why that particular public place was selected to witness the killing does not concern you. It is enough that he is dead, and that I confess the responsibility for his death.

"That is all I will say. I will reply to no questions. You may have this house searched, but you will find nothing."

She paused in her speech, smiling at the detective, and then she reached out her hands, holding them clasped together.

"You have handcuffs there," she said. "Put them on my wrists, if you please."

The officers for whom the detective had sent appeared then, and the house was searched from cellar to roof, but without result; and while the search was in progress, another policeman led Gerald Starbuck into the presence of Nick Carter.

But the horseman seemed not to recognize the detective. He walked perfectly well, and he replied in monosyllables when he was addressed; but other than that he made no remark, and he appeared as if he were under the influence of some subtle drug, the control of which he could not shake off.

And at last, just as the sun was rising over the housetops, Nick Carter had himself and his prisoner, with Starbuck also in the carriage with them, driven to the ferry, and so they crossed the ferry into the State of New York.

Idayah was committed to the Tombs; Starbuck was taken to a private room at the New York Hospital; the coroner was notified of the confession of Idayah—and the strange case of the murder of Baron Sternfeldt was concluded.

But the mysteries lying behind it all were not explained. It was known who killed him, and how he was killed; but why he was killed, or who he really was, bade fair to remain mysteries forever.

Only one of the mysteries was cleared up for the detective before he parted with Idayah at the Tombs. He said to her:

"I want you to reply to one question for me. It can do you no harm to do so. Was it you who stood behind me in Starbuck's office, when I made the promise not to turn my head or move?" and she replied:

"Yes; and if you had turned your head or moved at that time, you would have died on the instant you did so."

THE END.

We [illegible] of the New Century Weekly will be entitled "Idayah, The Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem." The story will deal with the mysteries of a strange cult which threatened Nick Carter with more remarkable perils than he had ever encountered before; and it will explain something of the [illegible] of the mysterious Idayah.

The Nick Carter Weekly

ISSUED EVERY SATURDAY. HANDSOMEST COLORED COVERS

No other detective library contains stories that are half so interesting. Nick Carter has been all over the world and has had experience with all kinds of criminals.

That's why, boys, his adventures holds one's interest from cover to cover. There is no brutality in Nick's make-up—he does not need it—he uses his wits. Do not fail to get the latest number from your newsdealer.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

505—The Man of Many Faces; or, Nick Carter Behind the Scenes.
506—A Letter From the Dead; or, Nick Carter's Proudest Moment.
507—Bare-faced Jimmy, the Gentleman Crook; or, Nick Carter's Amazing Experiment.
508—The Gentleman Crook's Last Act; or, Nick Carter and the Haunted House.
509—The "Skidoo" of the K. U. & T.; or, Nick Carter's Great Train Robbery Case.
510—The Last of the Outlaws; or, How Nick Carter Stopped the "Cannon-ball."
511—Nick Carter's Twin Mystery; or, The Secret of the Green Automobile.
512—A Battle of Wits; or, Nick Carter's Fight for Life.
513—A Game of Five Millions; or, Nick Carter's Fight With a Fiend.
514—Codman the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Strangest Experience.
515—The Plot of the Poisoner; or, Nick Carter's Hair-breadth Escape.
516—The Mechanical Giant; or, Ten-Ichi Plays a Lone Hand.
517—Doris, the Unknown; or, Nick Carter's Blindfold Mystery.
518—A Dangerous Woman; or, Nick Carter Faces a Crisis.
519—Hayley Marley's Ghost; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Fight.
520—An Automobile Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Bloodhound on the Scent.
521—The Mysterious Stranger; or, Nick Carter's Complex Case.
522—The White Arm of a Woman; or, Nick Carter's Desperate Chase.
523—The Man in the Doorway; or, Nick Carter's Conquest of a Castle.
524—The Plot of the Baron; or, Nick Carter's Telling Strategy.
525—The Passenger on the Night Local; or, Nick Carter's Perfect Disguise.
526—A Double Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Strong-hand Play.
527—Clarice, the Countess; or, Nick Carter's Motor-boat Chase.
528—Clarice, the Woman Detective; or, Nick Carter's Titled Assistant.
529—The Index of Seven Stars; or, Nick Carter Finds the Hidden City.
530—An Amazonian Queen; or, Nick Carter Becomes a Gladiator.
531—A Blackmailer's Paradise; or, Nick Carter Discovers the Hidden Hand.
532—Gipsy Madge, the Blackmailer; or, Nick Carter's First-class Bluff.
533—Facing an Unseen Terror; or, Nick Carter's Day of Blunders.
534—Idayah, the Woman of Mystery; or, Nick Carter's Fourfold Problem.
535—The Making of a King; or, Nick Carter Faces His Greatest Mystery.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

ISSUED EVERY TUESDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Buffalo Bill wins his way into the heart of every one who reads these strong stories of stirring adventure on the wide prairies of the West.

Boys, if you want tales of the West that are drawn true to life, do not pass these by.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

278—Buffalo Bill's Daring Plunge; or, The Grisly Ghost of Mahoe.
279—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Mission; or, The Round-up in Hidden Valley.
280—Buffalo Bill's Ghost Raid; or, Hot Times at Bubble Pricking.
281—Buffalo Bill's Traitor Guide; or, The Vengeance of Alkali Pete.
282—Buffalo Bill's Camp-fires; or, The Bad Man of Snake River Crossing.
283—Buffalo Bill Up a Stump; or, The Pawnee Faker of the Bitter Root.
284—Buffalo Bill's Secret Foe; or, The Wizard of Windy Gulch.
285—Buffalo Bill's Master-stroke; or, The Specter of Death Valley.
286—Buffalo Bill and the Masked Mystery; or, Teton John, the Half-breed.
287—Buffalo Bill and the Brazos Terror; or, The Lone Star Outlaws.
288—Buffalo Bill's Dance of Death; or, The Night Hawks of Snake River.
289—Buffalo Bill and the Creeping Terror; or, The Black Spider of the Shoshones.
290—Buffalo Bill and the Brand of Cain; or, The Wandering Jew of the Plains.
291—Buffalo Bill and the Mad Millionaire; or, The Redskin Rovers.
292—Buffalo Bill's Medicine-lodge; or, The White Queen of the Kickapoos.
293—Buffalo Bill in Peril; or, The Red Amazons of the Niobrarah.
294—Buffalo Bill's Strange Pard; or, Wolfer Joe on the War-path.
295—Buffalo Bill in the Death Desert; or, The Worship of the Phantom Flower.
296—Buffalo Bill in No Man's Land; or, The Sky-mirror of the Panhandle.
297—Buffalo Bill's Border Ruffians; or, The Desperate Game of Panther Pete.
298—Buffalo Bill's Black Eagles; or, The Snake-master from Timbuctoo.
299—Buffalo Bill's Desperate Dozen; or, The Raiders of Round-Robin Ranch.
300—Buffalo Bill's Rival; or, The Scalp-hunter of the Niobrarah.
301—Buffalo Bill's Ice Chase; or, The Trail of the Black Rifle.
302—Buffalo Bill and the Boy Bugler; or, The White Flower of Fetterman Prairie.
303—Buffalo Bill and the White Specter; or, The Mysterious Medicine-man of Spirit Lake.
304—Buffalo Bill's Death Defiance; or, The Bad Men of Timber Bar.
305—Buffalo Bill and the Barge Bandits; or, The Demon of Wolf River Cañon.
306—Buffalo Bill, the Desert Hotspur; or, Pizen Jane, of Cinnabar.
307—Buffalo Bill's Wild Range Riders; or, The Vengeance of Crazy Snake.
308—Buffalo Bill's Whirlwind Chase; or, The Mustang Catchers of Bitter Water.
309—Buffalo Bill's Red Retribution; or, The Raid of the Dancing Dervishes.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

ISSUED EVERY THURSDAY. **BEAUTIFUL COLORED COVERS**

Diamond Dick and his son, Bertie, are true men of the Western plains. They are noble-hearted fellows who don't impose on the weaker man and who don't let anyone else do it if they can help it.

You ought to read how they clean up a mining camp of the dishonest gamblers and other toughs who usually prey on the uneducated miners.

PRICE FIVE CENTS PER COPY

For sale by all newsdealers, or sent, by the publishers to any address upon receipt of price in money or postage stamps

HERE ARE THE LATEST TITLES:

512—Diamond Dick in the Saddle; or, The Secret of the Steel Glove.
513—Diamond Dick's Greatest Peril; or, The Strange Hobo of Death Valley.
514—Diamond Dick's Outlaw Duel; or, The Bronco-buster of the Pecos.
515—Diamond Dick's Mystic Mark; or, The Handkerchief Man's Vendetta.
516—Diamond Dick's Race Riot; or, A Hot Brush in Mexico.
517—Diamond Dick's Ghostly Round-up; or, The Phantom Steer of K-Bar-6.
518—Diamond Dick's Big Drive; or, Holding Them Down in a Blizzard.
519—Diamond Dick's Trail of Vengeance; or, Tracked to the Rio Grande.
520—Diamond Dick Holds the Fort; or, Hot Work Along the Big River.
521—Diamond Dick's Steel Glove; or, The Smiling Man From Santa Fé.
522—Diamond Dick's No-name Mystery; or, The Smiling Man's Bad Mistake.
523—Diamond Dick's Midnight Stampede; or, The Horse-thieves of the Cimarron.
524—Diamond Dick's Forlorn Hope; or, The Siege of Adobe Castle.
525—Diamond Dick's Night Watch; or, The Pretty Girl of Falling Rock.
526—Diamond Dick's Three To One; or, Backed By Uncle Sam.
527—Diamond Dick's Golden Quest; or, The Secret of Snake River.
528—Diamond Dick's Long Leap; or, Single-handed Against a Giant.
529—Diamond Dick's Heiress Hunt; or, A Dash Through the Big Divide.
530—Diamond Dick at the Throttle; or, The Ghostly Headlight of Hoodoo Pass.
531—Diamond Dick's Hobo Trail; or, The Man with the Long Blue Scar.
532—Diamond Dick's Black Sign; or, A Strange Battle with a Dead Man.
533—Diamond Dick's Queer Rebuke; or, Giving a Lesson to a "Bad Man."
534—Diamond Dick's Night Ride; or, The Worth of a Thoroughbred Pard.
535—Diamond Dick on an Indian Trail; or, The Vengeance of a Navaho.
536—Diamond Dick in Arizona; or, The Foolhardy Sport of Grand Cañon.
537—Diamond Dick Over the Rio Grande; or, A Hunt for a Girl Through Mexico.
538—Diamond Dick's Shower of Gold; or, The Princess of the Montezumas.
539—Diamond Dick Below the Line; or, An American Against Big Odds.
540—Diamond Dick on Shipboard; or, Blocking a Slick Game.
541—Diamond Dick's Wide Loop; or, Roping Five at One Throw.
542—Diamond Dick's Royal Foe; or, The Strange Passage of the *Santa Cruz*.
543—Diamond Dick's College Scrap; or, A Battle For His Alma Mater.
544—Diamond Dick in the Deep Snows; or, A Close Call on the Yukon.
545—Diamond Dick's Merciless Trail; or, The Two Rascals of White Horse.

If you want any back numbers of our libraries and cannot procure them from your newsdealers, they can be obtained from this office direct. Postage stamps taken the same as money.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, 79 Seventh Avenue, NEW YORK CITY.

GRAND LETTER COMPETITION

$100 in Gold Awarded for the Best Letters from Readers of

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Every one of the 50,000 boys who read the excellent stories of Western adventure published in the **Rough Rider Weekly,** has some special reason for liking them. Now, we intend to make it worth the while of every boy to tell us just what he thinks about the **Rough Rider Weekly** and hereby offer valuable prizes to those who write us the best letters regarding the stories themselves; how you may have worked to increase their circulation or what you know about the fascinating life of the modern ranchman, so ably described by our cowboy author, Mr. Ned Taylor. This competition is open freely to all who may desire to enter it, without charge or consideration of any kind. It is not necessary for competitors to be subscribers for **Rough Rider** in order to be eligible to compete.

Every contestant who does not win one of the cash prizes will receive a consolation prize.

The first competition opened October 1st, 1906, and closes April 1st, 1907, when a second contest will begin. The prize winners will be listed in April so that every one who reads the **Rough Rider Weekly** may know who has won. Here are the prizes:

$20.00 in Gold for the Best Letter.
$10.00 in Gold for Each of the Three Next Best Letters.
$5.00 in Gold for Each of the Six Next Best Letters.
$2.00 in Gold for Each of the Ten Next Best Letters.

The letters should not be longer than 250 words and should be plainly addressed to Manager of Rough Rider Letter Competition, care of Street & Smith. Now, boys, jump right in and make an effort to win a cash prize.

STREET & SMITH, Publishers, NEW YORK

THE FAVORITE LIST
OF FIVE-CENT LIBRARIES

Nick Carter Weekly

We know, boys, that there is no need of introducing to you Nicholas Carter, the greatest detective that ever lived. Every number containing the adventures of Nick Carter has a peculiar, but delightful power of fascination.

ROUGH RIDER WEEKLY

Ted Strong was appointed deputy marshal by accident, but he resolves to use his authority and rid his ranch of some very tough bullies. He does it in such a slick way that everyone calls him "King of the Wild West" and he certainly deserves his title. $100 in cash are given to the readers of this publication,

Buy a copy and learn how to come in for a share of it.

BRAVE AND BOLD

Every boy who prefers variety in his reading matter, ought to be a reader of Brave and Bold. All these were written by authors who are past masters in the art of telling boys' stories. Every tale is complete in itself.

MIGHT AND MAIN

These are stories of the adventures of boys who succeeded in climbing the ladder of fame by honest effort. No more interesting tales can be imagined. Each number is at least one-third longer than the ordinary five-cent library.

DIAMOND DICK WEEKLY

The demand for stirring stories of Western adventure is admirably filled by this library. Every up-to-date boy ought to read just how law and order are established and maintained on our Western plains by Diamond Dick, Bertie, and Handsome Harry.

BUFFALO BILL STORIES

Buffalo Bill is the hero of a thousand exciting adventures among the Redskins. These are given to our boys only in the Buffalo Bill Stories. They are bound to interest and please you.

BOWERY BOY LIBRARY

The adventures of a poor waif whose only name is "Bowery Billy." Billy is the true product of the streets of New York. No boy can read the tales of his trials without imbibing some of that resource and courage that makes the character of this homeless boy stand out so prominently.

The Tip Top Weekly

Frank Merriwell and his brother Dick are known and loved by over one hundred and fifty thousand of the best boys in the United States. They are both clean-cut, vigorous fellows who dare to do right no matter what the consequences. Get the current number. We are sure you will like it.